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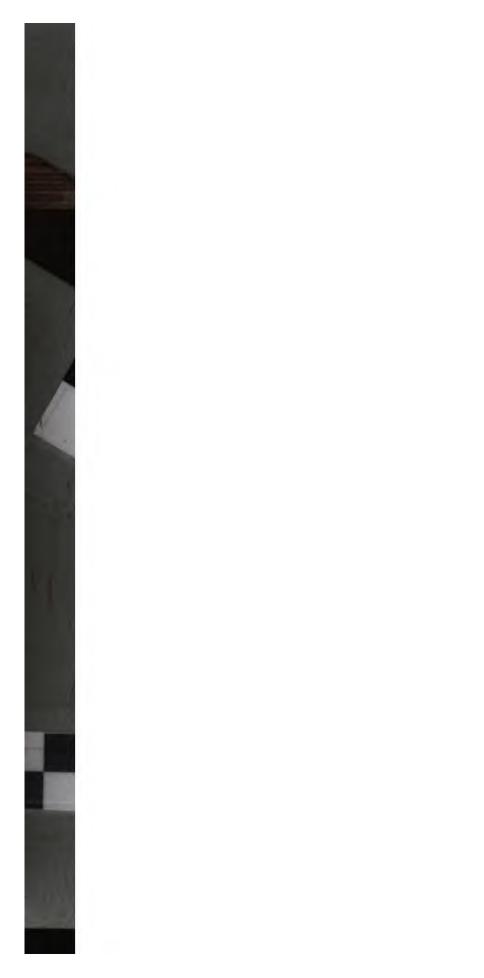
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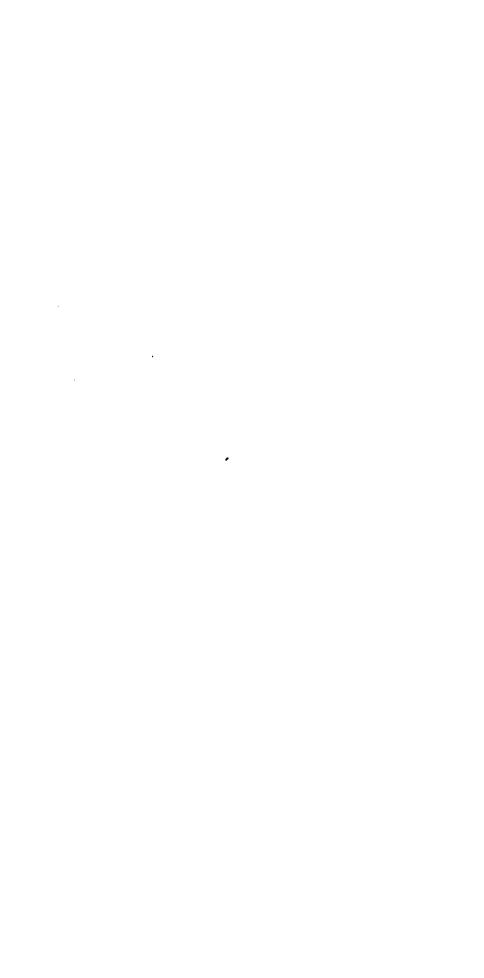
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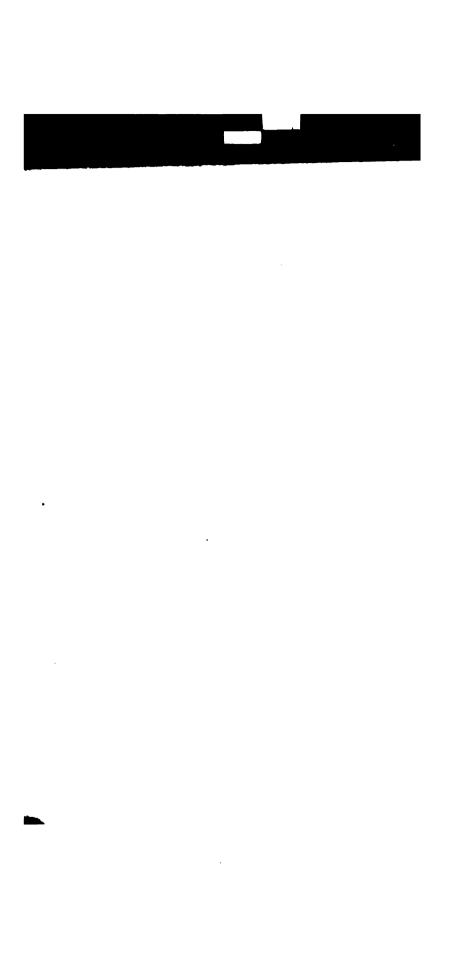


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THE RED RAG OF RITUAL



THE RED RAG OF RITUAL

BY

GEORGE CUSACK

AUTHOR OF 'HEART OF STONE,' ETC.



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PART I



THE RED RAG OF RITUAL

CHAPTER I

'MY PRETTY MAID'

'OH, please, may I go into your Catholic Church?'

The speaker, in common with many small persons, had an amount of self-confidence quite out of proportion to her size. It is therefore probable that if her auditor had not appeared on the scene at that moment, his permission would never have been asked. But there he was, standing at the door of his 'Catholic Church'; a tall figure in cassock and biretta, and he stooped from his height of six feet, as all lofty people do not, to glance kindly at the small pleader. Nay, more, he opened the door for her, and himself let her into the 'Catholic Church.' Perhaps the request pleased him, or the dark elfish beauty of the eight-year-old mite proved attractive. In any case they went in side by side; the man's burly form, with its powerful, close-cropped head, towering above the childish figure beside him.

He followed her up the aisle, as with childish ingratitude, having gained her point, she forgot all

about, him and pressed forward eagerly to behold for herself those wonderful mysteries which were keeping the whole neighbourhood in a state of excitement.

She trotted in a tremendous hurry up the aisle, drawing a grubby hand along the clean, new seats in her progress, and never pausing till, breathless and excited, she stood before the altar.

It was Saturday, and fresh flowers had just been placed there. The child sniffed their fragrance with satisfaction, and nodded in an approving manner towards the reredos and the sanctuary lamp. vicar was close behind her now. He thought it safer at this juncture not to leave her to her own devices, in case those restless feet penetrated farther than was desirable. She might even, he thought, consider a few altar flowers a lawful memento of her visit; but in this he had wronged her. Something in the stillness of the place appealed even to her childish irreverence. She was silent quite a long time for her, then she drew a deep breath. she said to herself, indicating things in general with a patronising and comprehensive wave of her small, dirty hand, 'if this is a high rigouristic church, I like 'Tisn't so particular high neither,' measuring the height of the roof with her eyes. 'Not much higher than our chapel at home.' Elfrida was evidently in that elementary stage which has not separated niceness and prettiness from goodness! Her childish soul was consumed with a child's love of pretty

things, and a child's hatred of injustice. She felt that the Catholic Church had been misrepresented to her in some way, and she resented it. 'Poor Catholic Church,' she said, 'you're not a bit wicked, you're nice and pretty, and so I shall tell them.' She made this speech in a soothing tone to the building in general, as if to comfort it for the aspersions cast upon it.

The sunshine fell on her unabashed childish face, as a sudden movement brought her in sight of the Lady Chapel, and she rushed forward eagerly. 'Oh,' she cried, 'what a sweet little room! I shall be a Catholic, and sit in it. This is the tadies' chapel; gentlemen aren't allowed here. There's a sort of one, though,' glancing towards the altar, 'that funny thing in a frock!'

The 'funny thing in a frock' happened to be the Rev. Francis Philmore, the curate, who was kneeling at his private devotions in his cassock.

He rejoiced in chiselled features and the reputation for saintliness which that particular cast of countenance always gives, but the glance which he bestowed on the small disturber of his peace, as he hurriedly rose from his knees, was not altogether saintly!

The vicar from behind made an audible sound of amusement. Then he picked up the self-constituted Catholic and set her on his knee. 'Come here, small child,' he said, 'and tell me how you like the "Catholic Church."'

- 'Oh!' she cried, 'it's fine! Is it real Catholic?'
- 'I—hope so.'
- 'How old is it?'
- 'Eighteen hundred years old.'

She knitted her brows. 'But this is a new church. You only builded it last year.'

He laughed, and stroked her hair. 'Never mind, little one, you like it, don't you?'

'Oh yes; it's so pretty. I should think God likes Catholics, 'cos they give Him pretty things! I should,' emphatically.

He smiled. 'Being a Catholic isn't all pretty things,' he said; 'there are hard things too.'

'Oh yes, I know,' interrupting him eagerly. 'A place called perjury—and confession. I should like to confess to you,' she added naïvely, 'you're such a nice man; but they say you won't be here long, 'cos you're going to Rome.'

Chuckling inwardly, the vicar took the new Catholic by the hand, and saw her safely outside the church.

He discovered afterwards that she was a boardingout child, down from London, and was boarding with his housekeeper, Mrs. Crouch. Therefore, as he was obliged of necessity to see a great deal of Mrs. Crouch, he would probably see more of Elfrida also.

CHAPTER II

'MY SON'

FATHER METHUEN, the vicar of S. Sebastien's, was fond of calling himself a Catholic who worked on broad lines. What that meant exactly, no one knew or cared. If a man is personally popular, he may 'hold the opinions of a heathen Chinee, for all the generality of people will trouble!' And the vicar was popular. He remembered the exact number of children in a family, and always inquired after their respective ailments. For babies, in particular, he had a really intelligent admiration; in fact he never forgot any one, and, on the strength of this, he might have done anything he liked in the ritual line, only He called it having a soul above he was lazy. In any case the minutiæ of worship with other unimportant duties, as the vicar called them, were left to his coadjutor, Father Philmore.

Now Philmore was neither lazy nor popular; he was the sort of person whom people respect—and let alone.

It was rumoured privately that this apparently austere young man was entirely under the vicar's

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thumb. That the vicar took all sorts of liberties with him, and called him 'the Infant,' on account of his youthful and embryonic appearance. In fact, the name had gradually become public property, no one exactly knew how, any more than they knew why they called their clergy 'Father.' Some one had started it, probably, and the others had followed.

Inquiring minds were not lacking at S. Sebastien's to demand why these beardless and presumably guileless young clerics, whose lofty aims soared high above vulgar matrimony, should be so ambitious to be called 'Father'; and to demand also why some were Fathers and some were not. But we all know that people with inquiring minds are a great nuisance, and that vulgar curiosity deserves no answer, particularly where the question happens to be unanswerable.

So the youthful 'Fathers' asserted their rights as free-born Britons, and continued to be a law unto themselves, and to put on their Fatherhood as they donned their vestments, according to individual preference. If people would only recognise the prevalence of this law *in* the Church as well as out of it, a good deal that is puzzling would become perfectly simple.

It is strange, though, that while no one requires more toleration and takes more latitude than the so-called 'ritualist,' no one accords less. He may arrange his own affairs by individual judgment, but he loudly denies the right of other people to do likewise. In fact, he wants to be a Pope, but he never will, because every one else wants just the same.

We all want to 'boss our own show,' to be first in affection or authority, according to temperament. First with every one, if possible; failing that, with some one. It is supposed to be a woman's characteristic; as a matter of fact, it belongs to the whole human race. It is useful and necessary for the propagation of the species, but it has its root in the egotism of the natural man, which, like all other natural qualities, is pre-eminently undivine.

Father Methuen and Father Philmore were essentially different; yet each in his way wanted to rule his particular small world, with this distinction, that while Father Methuen's world revolved around himself as chief luminary, Father Philmore owned the light of a guiding-star, and that star was Father Methuen.

The 'Infant' loved ritual. He would fuss all day over the arrangement of the altar flowers or the correct colour of a book-marker, much to his 'Superior's' amusement, who, although possessing a much finer sense of the artistic, preferred not to worry himself by applying it. 'Come away, my son,' he would say. 'No one will notice the exact position of the altar candles except you.'

Then he would carry his young coadjutor off to smoke. He was fond of saying that he was very

good for the Infant, who took life much too seriously. 'You should look on human beings as specimens, Philmore,' he would say. 'Regarded as individuals, they are bound to fail you.'

Every human being interested 'the Father'; himself first, and afterwards perhaps the Rev. Francis Philmore, as part of himself; that is, a product of his training. He often said that 'the Infant' would turn out a fine character one day. At present he only amused him immensely. His utter lack of knowledge of the world, his almost prudish horror of vice, and persistence in shutting his eyes to it; the narrowness with which he pinned his faith to a certain set of doctrines, and his affection to a limited number of individuals, were set down by Father Methuen as signs of youth which would soon pass off.

To the 'Infant's' affection for himself the Father made no exception. It was noteworthy that while he often took the young man to task for his *private* mortifications of the flesh, it never seemed to strike him that the early services, and the district visiting which the Infant did for him, could do his health any harm.

He was seriously considering his young coadjutor's character, as he sat smoking one night, with his feet on the mantelpiece, and a very old shooting-coat on.

Father Philmore was in his cassock; he was going

to take evensong presently, leaving his Superior to diagnose his temperament.

There was to be a short address, and he had been getting it up. He was rather noted for his addresses, which were of a very different type from the vicar's; the latter's being crisp and up to date, and full of a quaint quizzicality that was never unkind, while the younger man's had the zeal of an enthusiast, and the narrowness which people are apt to call bigotry, but which really is only another name for being very sure in one's own mind. After all, truth cannot lie in all directions, and those who have found it, or think they have, may be excused for assuming as a natural deduction that others are in error.

Father Methuen's study was characteristic of himself, as rooms are of their owners. Generally it was kept in order by the Infant, whose neat soul groaned within him at the sight of pipes keeping company with books of devotion; novels and sermons hobnobbing together; a dusty piano and a crucifix, with a vase of dead flowers scrupulously arranged before it.

The vicar loved pretty things when they gave him no trouble, but he hated being behind the scenes while preparations were going on; he said it 'spoilt the effect.' For this reason he was never to be found helping at decorations, or school-treat teas, or 'coaching' a procession. He liked strolling in at the last moment when all was ready.

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Father Methuen stared thoughtfully into the fire; he always sat in that particular place from habit, and he always *lolled*, while Father Philmore sat upright in an attitude of strict rectitude.

'My son,' he said, 'I am anxious about you. You're too good; you'll break out soon.'

Father Philmore smiled. 'I'm anxious too,' he said, consulting his watch, 'about the time for evensong.'

'Oh, never mind the time; don't be so fearfully exact. I'll give you absolution if you keep them waiting.—What have I said now? Here, stop a minute, man! Seriously, Philmore, there's a strain of puritanism in you, which you've got to root out like the plague.'

Father Philmore was half-way towards the door, and looking high and low for his biretta, which he finally discovered poised on his Superior's foot.

Patiently detaching it, he disappeared smiling, while the elder man looked after him quite gravely. 'He's a good lad,' he said, 'but he takes things so much to heart—it's such a pity!'

He mused, and was still musing when Philmore returned, and so deeply that he did not notice his coadjutor's entrance till the latter stretched himself on a chair and sighed. He was tired; enthusiasm is tiring. He had been preaching to-night on what was to him a vital point, and he fancied he had made some converts. As a matter of fact, it was his

earnestness on the point, more than the point itself, which had impressed his hearers.

He was thinking it over, and something in the firm lines of the lips, that had just a suspicion of hardness about them, and in the general aloofness of his expression, irritated the Father.

'My son,' he said, 'you're not entertaining to-night! Come off the mountain top. You've had too much spiritual dissipation lately.'

Father Philmore did not retort, as he might have done, that his 'spiritual dissipation' that day had consisted in saving the vicar's steps, but he poked the fire obediently and prepared to be entertaining.

'We'll talk about you,' said Father Methuen indulgently. 'I'm anxious about you, Philmore. Your manner, my son, is irritable; not to me, I grant, but then you love me, so that's nothing, but to others, you are crabby, and it's such a mistake. Do study to cultivate a manner superior to yourself. Now yours does you injustice; you offend people, and then you're a failure.'

'What do you call a failure?' said Father Philmore. He spoke so quietly that his Superior was surprised, and observed him closely before replying.

'A failure,' he said slowly, 'is a man who skirts success all his life, but fails to enter the charmed circle through sheer want of *push*. Now, you haven't enough push, Philmore, or rather, your push is in the wrong direction! Don't make yourself too cheap,

boy. Don't give away too much, affection or anything else; it's a mistake. Don't arrive just too late for everything in this world, and then comfort yourself with the next. That's not morality, it's morbidness; and, instead of jeering at the successful people, find out their secret if you can. It's the failures of this world that fill our convents and sisterhoods, sad to relate!—the people that nobody wants, who "are not good enough for man, and so are given to God." Don't be a failure, Philmore: failures are inartistic blots on the landscape.'

Father Philmore did not speak for a moment; he was collecting his forces. Then he did an uncommon thing for him—he asserted against his Superior that part of himself that was outside the Father's knowledge, and even occasionally revolted from him. 'Our points of view are opposite,' he said dryly. 'I am quite content to be an inartistic blot on the landscape, and I ask nothing better than to be "given to God."'

The Father had chosen an unlucky time for his disagreeable task. The younger man was excited over the success of his address, and inclined to be on a pedestal, and his self-righteous attitude irritated Methuen.

'Don't be melodramatic, my son,' he said. 'I don't believe in self-inflicted martyrdom—in hurling disagreeable truths at people, and then blaming them for quarrelling with you.'

'Neither do I believe,' came the hot retort, 'in administering religion in the form of a sugar-coated pill. That's what people want nowadays. Everything must be "palatable." The Catholic faith is too disagreeable for them while they're alive, but they want it to smooth their way to heaven when they're dying; in fact, to take them there by a sort of luxurious Pulman-car arrangement! They want their sins glossed over, and called "failings," and made to look pretty, as they cover their wrinkles with paint and powder; but it's no good. God won't do it. There are no short cuts to heaven: you can't have a Christian religion with the Cross taken out of it.'

The Father absolutely gasped. This was a side of his coadjutor's character which he neither knew nor liked.

'That is the injustice of the worldly point of view,' continued Philmore, 'to have your cake and eat it; to enjoy all the good things of this world, and the next too! Yes, there's a fine crusade to be waged against modern selfishness, and the Sacraments of the Catholic Church are the only weapon.'

'Then you think,' said Methuen gently, 'that selfishness only exists outside the Church—that inside, the motives are of the highest? That unmixed love to God is the object of her ritual and the rule of her life in the world? There is no striving within the fold as to who shall be greatest? No love of pomp and show for their own sakes? No idolatry of self

or some other god at the root of worship? Think carefully, my son, before answering.'

The Father did not speak unkindly, and the eyes of his young coadjutor drooped before him. But there was more to come.

'Philmore, I must say it, even at the risk of offending you. It is people like you who do harm to the Catholic Church. You pride yourself, don't you, on living the sacramental life, as you call it. You take into yourself, as you believe, the Body of the Lord.' Father Philmore shuddered and crossed himself. 'But it seems to me that you have very little to show for it in your life; very little love for your fellow-creatures in your heart; you are bitter and intolerant to every one except me. As to your ruling passion, your motive power, you know what that is, and so do I.'

Father Philmore was silent. His temper was over; he was only conscious now of the wall of separation that was being set up between them at every word.

The Father's voice sounded very far away as he moistened his dry lips. 'Then aren't you a Catholic?' he asked drearily. Father Methuen smiled—a strange, half-amused smile.

'Perhaps not,' he said, 'from your point of view. To my mind the way we worship is a matter of temperament. That there is a God we are bound to believe. His existence is demonstrated by two facts—the voice of conscience regulated in individuals by temperament, and digestion.—Don't look so

shocked!—And the immortality of the soul. To deny a future state is unreasonable; to define and limit it by human terms is, to my mind, presumptuous. We know absolutely nothing about it, and the sooner we own our ignorance the better.'

The Father paused; the sound of his own voice had done him good, as usual. 'We have had an interesting discussion,' he said; then, more sharply, as his coadjutor did not answer: 'Philmore, you had better go to bed. Good-night, and don't forget you take the early service.'

Methuen sat up late that night, after Philmore had obeyed orders and retired. It was just as well, he told himself, that he had taken down that strain of independence in Philmore, and the lad had behaved pretty well on the whole. Yet, as the Father sat musing, his pipe between his lips, the genial face was clouded with an expression which few of his flock would have recognised. A haunting doubt possessed him, as to whether, after all, Philmore had not had the best of it. He had thrown cold water on the lad's devotion. He had done his best to prove him wrong, but had he succeeded? He had called him a fool, but was it pity for his foolishness, or envy of his superiority that had actuated him?

They say that in solitude we are our true selves. Be that as it may, the Father retired to rest that night with a feeling of irritation against his coadjutor for making him dwell on disagreeable topics!

CHAPTER III

'THEM PRIESTS'

'POMPS and vanities, John, that's what I call them! Adorning the house of God, indeed; not a bit of it! Adorning their own sinful bodies, and call that worship!'

John sighed. A woman's tongue—we all know the rest; but when that woman is your wife, and you are dependent on her to get your tea, it is as well to be conciliatory.

In fact, John was often nearly pulled in two between his wife and the Church. They never agreed, and, as he was dependent on them both in a way, he had to keep the peace between them.

He was verger and parish clerk, and general factorium at S. Sebastien's: and his wife was house-keeper and cook, and adviser in general to the clergy. That is to say, she tried her best to fill the last-named office, and was wont to boast that only her influence kept them from Rome.

John and his wife lived at the parsonage, and had lived there ever since the beginning of everything at

S. Sebastien's. That is to say, before the church was built, and when the little mission-room, now used as a Sunday-school, had served all purposes, secular and religious.

They spoke grandly to new-comers of the missionroom days, and on the strength of their preadamite connection with the place, felt privileged to speak their minds on all occasions.

There were many things in the 'carryings-on,' as Mrs. Crouch termed them, to which she and John took exception; but the latter, although a great stickler for the 'Scriptures as they stand,' has added the gospel of expediency to his own private edition, and he knew that bread and butter is a necessity, so manfully swallowed his principles at the same time. His wife, being a woman, was not so cautious: also she had an idea that she and John were necessary to the welfare of the Church. The vicar smiled at her, but the curate, being younger, and more headstrong, used strong language over her, for a curate.

'John,' said his wife emphatically, 'it's an insult to the Almighty. God is a Spirit.' She had the teapot in one hand, and the kettle in the other, and John glanced suggestively at the clock. 'Oh yes, yes, of course,' he said soothingly, 'but let me have my tea, mother. I've got to be off again directly.'

Thus adjured, 'mother' set down the teapot with a bang.

'What's the good of saying "Yes, of course," and

then flying straight in the face of it?' she demanded. 'You're a panderer, John.'

What a strange thing is woman! If any one else had called her husband names she would have flown at them promptly; but John thought the time had come to put her down. There is such a thing as righteous anger.

'Look here, wife,' he said, 'while you're talking of what you don't understand, I'm working, and I don't come here to be jawed at. You know well enough that we've got to be housed and fed, so what's the good of quarrelling with your bread and butter? Beside,' soothingly, 'can't we put up with the follies of the young? They'll change their minds some day, but young men must have their fling, and these 'ere fooleries may keep them from worse, who knows?'

And so the couple, in the pride of superior wisdom, merged their differences, and smoked the pipe of peace. At least John smoked it, and over it he waxed loquacious.

'Vicar says to me to-day as how the Infant was piling things on a bit, but he just let him alone. It's a good thing for vicar that he's got me for a friend, just to open his mind to. 'E's not 'igh in 'is 'art, not a bit.'

His partner, only half mollified, burst out again. 'Don't tell me,' she said. 'I don't trust vicar one bit more than t'other. Make a friend of you; make

a fool of you more likely. Mark my word, 'e's just as far gone as t'other, only he's cuter. Why, look at that 'ere insects last Sunday! Made my inside feel exactly as if I was on the "Skylark," and as to the percessions, when I see them coming towards me, I tell you, John, my hair rises, and cold creeps go down my back. Just like that night when a drunken man ran after me down our passage. No. I can't abear it, and I don't consider as how delicate women should be subjec' to such things. Not 'igh indeed; go along! Why, only this very afternoon our little Elfie got into church somehow, and vicar took her Fair crazed, she was. She'll be going to confession next! They get the children, that's the cuteness of it; but the day of the Lord will come, and the sins of the fathers will be visited on the-Why, the man's gone!'

Mrs. Crouch's quotations generally went to prove the exact opposite, but she didn't trouble. After all, a quotation is a quotation.

The roguish face of the child Elfie appeared at the window just then. She was dressed in a scarlet twill frock, and her dark elf-locks hung round her face in a picturesque confusion, framing her glowing cheeks.

'Come and have your tea,' said Mrs. Crouch tartly. She did not love children. Her own baby had died at birth, perhaps frightened out of the world by its mother's quotations! In any case, she had borne a

grudge against the whole race of children ever since.

'I've had tea,' said Elfie proudly, 'upstairs with the vicar. He is a nice man. Oh, I hope he doesn't go!'

'Who?' said Mrs. Crouch sharply. 'You hadn't any business,' she added.

'The vicar. Every one says he's going. Oh, I wish it was the other one.'

'Going, nonsense! Going to London for a day, most likely. It might be to Rome, though,' she added, sotto voce. She would not have owned it for the world, but she was not quite sure whether going to Rome involved a visit to the capital or not. Perhaps Elfrida knew? She glanced at the culprit, sitting in much self-satisfaction on a high chair dangling her legs. Perhaps, thought Mrs. Crouch piously, it might be her duty to hear what nonsense had been put into the child's head by 'them Priests.'

'Well, what else did you hear?' she said grudgingly. 'Come, out with it, and perhaps I'll forgive you for going where you hadn't no business. Not that I hold with little girls of your age sitting on vicar's knees.'

Elfrida smiled. When you have been placed on the vicar's knees by the vicar himself, the displeasure of a Mrs. Crouch is a mere detail! Probably, Elfrida thought, she was jealous. She wondered vaguely what age Mrs. Crouch considered the correct one for sitting on the vicar's knee. Was it her own?

Children are very sharp. Elfrida knew perfectly that no interest for her moral welfare, but burning curiosity as to what she had heard, prompted Mrs. Crouch's questions. They laugh that win, and the game was in her hands.

'We talked of a many things,' she said importantly, with the air of one who *could* say a great deal more: 'let me "fink." He gave me some sweets, and he said, "My little maid, life is 'sweets to the sweets." What did he mean?'

Mrs. Crouch sniffed indignantly. Was it for this she had humbled herself? 'Mean,' she said irately; 'tommy rot!'

Elfrida was puzzled. 'Oh,' she said vaguely, 'then the other one came in—I do hate him—and he looked crosser than ever at seeing me there.'

- 'I should think so indeed. Everything in its place and devil take the—— No, that isn't what I meant. Well, go on, and speak the truth, if you can.'
- 'Then the vicar put me down,' pursued Elfrida, 'and kissed me, and I came away. Oh, I hope he doesn't go!'
- 'You can go,' said Mrs. Crouch severely, 'to bed. And mind, next time you repeat anything, off you go, back to London. Little girls should hear, see, and say nothing.'

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Considering that she had been expressly asked to repeat all she had heard, Elfrida felt the injustice of this remark, but she had been kissed by the vicar, and so could afford to be magnanimous—to one who had not!

CHAPTER IV

'A LITTLE CLOUD'

THERE was something wrong in the parish. The vicar seemed to have disappeared, and Father Philmore was more austere than usual.

When a work is just at its beginning, every one is more intimately connected with every one else than they can possibly be when things have grown out of hand, as it were. Looking back on the past, what a magic there is in the first times. When they get beyond that, one loses count.

Something was 'up' at S. Sebastien's. People knew it, and felt it in the air, and shook their heads at each other. Father Methuen had been the centre of his little world so long that his absence made itself felt.

He was not away, and he came to church occasionally, but he looked different, and every one felt it. Even little Elfie, who glanced at her kind friend, but did not venture to put her hand into his after seeing his face.

And no one dared to ask Father Philmore what was the matter. The difference between the two men came out very plainly just now. The younger was

respected, but not loved; he had never made himself one with the people, and so they held aloof from him.

There were real prayers going up from honest hearts who loved the genial Father, in those days. It was just 'God bless our Father, he's in trouble.' And it spoke well for him; for the trouble was vague, and therefore the prayer had to be vague, and as a rule vague prayers and vague troubles do not commend themselves to the poor. Their lives are too real; they pray for daily bread, and expect to get it!

Between the two friends also this undefinable something had come, that is one of the saddest things on earth, when it *does* come.

Father Philmore sat by the window of the parsonage. The room was untidy, and he had not straightened it; neither had he been called to order, as usual, for his omission. He was staring over the fields at the new houses that were springing up between the parsonage and the sea, and he was thinking that in a minute the bell would ring for evensong. He waited for it to begin till it got on his nerves, and at last the Father spoke, as if guessing his thought. 'There will be no evensong to-night.' The other did not ask why; he hardly wondered, and he certainly did not care. He only sat, and waited. There is hardly any one who has not, at some time of their lives, concentrated their whole being on waiting. It is an act only learnt

by long experience, and Father Philmore had not learnt it yet—he waited very badly.

He was wondering wearily how this estrangement, if it was an estrangement, had begun. He remembered how often something that his Superior had said had pulled him up short, as it were, with a shock, but he had put it away, and dwelt on pleasanter things, as we all do, preferring to remain in our fool's paradise as long as possible.

He remembered how he had called the Father's tolerance for sin kind-heartedness, and his easy-going theology broad-mindedness. He remembered it all now as he looked at the familiar figure by the fireplace.

Still silence. Not the silence of easy intimacy between friends who do not require words. Not the silence in which we tell the children an angel is passing, but the dreadful brooding silence of something coming.

It was broken by Mrs. Crouch—opening the door with the supper tray.

The younger man moved irritably, and muttered an impatient exclamation, while Father Methuen, with his usual ready courtesy, turned to her with some pleasant remark.

Perhaps he was relieved at her entrance. At any rate she commented on the difference between the two men when she went downstairs. 'One always pleasant, and the other not a word to throw at a dog!'

CHAPTER V

'WE COULD HAVE BETTER SPARED A BETTER MAN'

MRS. CROUCH'S entrance had broken the spell. The Father turned to his coadjutor, and his voice was not pleasant now.

- 'Shut the window,' he said irritably.
- 'It is shut.'
- 'Then open it.' And without a smile Father Philmore obeyed.
- 'Come over here—I've something to tell you.' (Of course he had, Philmore knew it well, but in great moments only obvious words occur to us.)

The younger man moved to his usual place.

Father Methuen had the cat on his knee. He loved animals as well as children, but to-day his hand had an unusually impatient movement, and the cat resented it, and scratched him: whereupon he flung it with unnecessary violence to the other end of the room, caressing his wounded finger tenderly. Yes, he hated to be hurt, and what is more, he hated the person who hurt him, and he was suffering just now, pretty severely.

'I'm going away,' he said feebly. Father Philmore said 'Yes?' with the sense that the real catastrophe was to come, and he added, 'Perhaps it will be best,' for want of something else to say.

'Yes, it will be best for you certainly, for in sending in my resignation I've recommended you for the living. In fact, I may say it is virtually yours.'

He paused, then added, 'You will have a fine opportunity for usefulness, Philmore.'

How cruel, how very cruel, we can be to those we love, and Father Methuen did love his coadjutor, though the latter did not realise it then; did not know that this man, on whom he had pinned his faith, loved him as well as it was in his nature to love any one. We all have our limitation of temperament, and must judge each other, as we hope to be judged, not by what we cannot do or be, but by what we can.

But Father Philmore was young, and he did not know how differently different people suffer; the utter cruelty and mockery of it all struck him.

He in the living: in the old familiar haunts, without all that had endeared them to him! And yet, as the Father said, with a fine opportunity for usefulness, with the Church and the Sacraments about which he had preached with youthful fervour. What then was wanting? Was it indeed not God that he had worshipped, except as seen in this man who

had been his idol? Had he been all the time a Pharisee, an unconscious hypocrite? Had his joy been a false joy? His happiness a spurious happiness, dependent on the caprices of a sinful fellowmortal who was going away and leaving him bereft Who was watching now, with eyes that looked almost mocking, the downfall of a faith that had seemed greater than his own, to the level of idol-worship! A horrible thought—a sacrilegious thought to a nature such as Father Philmore's. rose from his seat and leaned against the mantel-His whole being was in a tumult, but at present the sense of shock predominated. is always an interval between a blow and the sense of pain, between a child's fall and its cry.

And Father Methuen, the tender-hearted father? Well, he was a many-sided man, it must be remembered, and there was a side of him that was not tender, but coldly analytical and critical. Also, he loved a situation, a crisis, in which to observe his fellow-mortals, and this one had proved him right, had proved that this proud young dogmatist was in no way superior to himself. Well, he had been cruel to be kind, and the boy would thank him in time for tearing the scales from his eyes.

He had proved also the young fellow's evident devotion to himself, and that could not but please him. Altogether 'the Father' felt better, and could afford to be amiable. 'Philmore,' he said, 'come and sit down and talk it over. Look at it sensibly, man. Come here where I can see you.'... Still silence. The Father touched another chord in this heart which he thought he knew so well.

'Philmore,' he said, 'you upset me. Consider the matter a little from my point of view.'

The words roused the younger man from his most unusual fit of self-absorption as nothing else could have done. After all, it was the Father who was chiefly concerned—the Father who was giving up his calling and going forth without one!

'You will have a position,' continued the vicar, 'that for a young man is almost unique. The world will count you a lucky man, my son.'

Yes, the world, thought Father Philmore bitterly. The world which judges from the outside only might even think that he had ousted Methuen, as he had, or so the Father told him, by his bigotry and ritualism. God help him!

'After all,' continued Methuen, 'we could not have lived together always. I was not suited to the life, or the life to me. To tell the truth, I was getting tired of it.'

A faint, far-away smile came to the white lips of Father Philmore. While he had been living in his fool's paradise, the Father had been getting tired of it, and of him!

By the blessed law of compensation we cannot be hurt twice in the same way. If the first blow is as bad as it can be, it follows of necessity that the succeeding ones are lighter.

When the Father said, 'I was getting tired of it,' he could say nothing worse to Father Philmore—the limit of suffering was reached.

It was strange that he had never asked the Father why he was going or where. The omission struck Father Methuen after his coadjutor had left him. And why was he going? Was it a matter of conscience? He was an adept in the art of avoiding disagreeable topics, but there are times when they force an entrance.

If he had been working with any other man, he would not, probably, have found out his state of mind so soon, but the earnestness of his coadjutor riled, because it shamed him.

He had called himself lightly 'a Catholic, with a mind above ritual,' and from that he had come to wonder if he was a Catholic at all, in the common acceptation of the word. If not, what business had he in that Church?

Father Philmore's ritual amused him, yet he had come to see that certain acts are only the outward expression of certain truths. Did he hold these truths, or did he not? In other words, was he a Christian, or was he not? His decision to go was sufficient answer. Father Philmore being mainly responsible, there was a certain irony of justice in his suffering.

Philmore took the early service next morning, the vicar having sent up word that he was 'too upset.'

It all looked strange and dream-like to his dazed eyes; the altar lights seemed burning far away as the Father's voice had sounded the night before. The server looked at him, and wondered, as people did wonder about Father Philmore without understanding him. He made no act of reparation to an offended Deity. His false god was dead, and the true God far away—an unreal person to his empty heart.

He went through the service mechanically; his one idea to get it over.

It came to an end at last, and he wondered heavily how many more such services he should have to take in the course of his life.

The news of Father Methuen's departure spread like wildfire and caused a general consternation. No one knew exactly why he was going, but they did not blame him half as much for resigning the living as they did Father Philmore for staying in his place.

It is a strange fact that in the opinion of the 'man in the street' an atheist may be, and generally is, a very fine fellow, while a ritualist is hardly a man at all.

The vicar had a special farewell for John Crouch, because he knew John's weakness for himself, and to

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the care of this factorum he actually transmitted the physical and moral welfare of 'the Infant,' whose proud soul would have risen in wild revolt had he known of this last insult.

'Keep him in order, John,' the vicar said, laughing. 'He'll want it!'

'Ay, that he will,' said Mrs. Crouch, who made no secret of her wish that Father Philmore had been the one to go. 'With his tomfooleries the place'll be unbearable.'...

And so, followed by tears and prayers and blessings, the vicar made his smiling farewells, but to Father Philmore he did not say good-bye at all.

CHAPTER VI

IDOLS

THE sanctuary lamp was burning low in the Lady Chapel. It ought to have been replenished, and Father Philmore knew it, but he did not move. All his lamps were going out, and one more or less did not matter. Beside, if yonder dim presence was not 'the Great Sacrament,' it was nothing, and they had better go out. Anyway, his lights of worship had not burned before it—though he had thought so in his blindness. Now he knew that they had burned at an earthly shrine.

The expiring light showed the prostrate figure in its accustomed place before the altar. He had come there from force of habit, to fight out his unseen battle, but in presence of what? The Very Incarnate Son of God or an empty form? The very medicine for all human ills, or a material substance only; a thing to be ridiculed by thinking men as an object of worship? Who were the fools, the people who worshipped, or the people who did not?

The question must be settled here and now, before yonder Presence which would be all or nothing to him for evermore.

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It throbbed in his weary brain as it will throb in thousands of brains till all mysteries shall be revealed, and among them the greatest of all, which is the existence of mystery!

There comes a time to all earnest souls when they have to take their lives into their own hands; to settle for themselves whether religion is a pretty fable, an admirable study in ethics; or something to live and die by. No other man's creed will suffice; no other man's experience can help them then. Each soul must pass alone through its Gethsemane and Calvary, till it gains, if God so wills, its final heaven.

We may believe or disbelieve in religion, but we are bound to believe in suffering, as we believe in death. It comes to all: the difference is in the way they take it. From most the cry goes up, 'Not that way. Show me an easier path, not marked with blood.'

They want to dodge suffering, here and hereafter, but inexorable Justice says No, while Divine Pity holds the cup to the trembling lips with pierced hands, and just a few, in grasping the cup, grasp the meaning too.

There was no submission in the heart of Father Philmore. His sorrow was selfish sorrow. It was not the Father's loss of faith but his loss of the Father that had sapped his life to the foundations. The one redeeming point was that he had grasped the fact. He knew now that he could not lose his

own faith in God, for he had no faith to lose. His faith had been in a man, and that man had known it, and laughed at his self-deception.

The hands outstretched in the darkness did not seek the Hand of God. That Hand had taken from him his idol, and he hated It. He was asking for its return, that was all.

Ah, fools and blind! we turn from the God who longs for us to the gods of our own setting up. From the Hands that were rent for us to the hands that rend us, and we see our folly time after time, that is the pity of it.

The problem of misplaced affection and wrecked faith will always be one of the most pathetic things in this pathetic world! Why this waste, we cry, with starving souls all around? Why are we allowed to choose wrong? To spend our small spark of the Infinite on the finite, instead of returning it to God who gave it? Why is there such a tendency in the human heart to scorn what is freely offered in the way of love, and turn to an affection which is harder of attainment? We shrink in horror from the suffering which is sent us, to fulfil our destiny, and with natural perversion, we hug our self-inflicted martyrdom, because it is self-chosen. We erect altars to self, and then wonder at the vacant thrones, and the desolate places in the human heart!

We waste and pervert that divine gift, the power of self-sacrifice, to our own damnation.

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Ah, our idols have much to answer for. Our cruel idols, often with hearts of stone, but dearly beloved!

Father Philmore, lying there utterly stranded, knew that his idol was worthless, and yet he would have returned to it at a word. If the Father had said, 'Philmore, I have lost my faith, but I have kept my love for you, come with me!' he would have followed him to the end of the world, faith or no faith. Oh the pity of the poor human heart crying 'My God' to a false god!

We hear a great deal nowadays about idolatry in the Church of England, but we are far more likely to worship too little than too much, for, after all, it is only an overflow of love to God that can lead to an exaggerated reverence for His representations.

Again, we are so material; creatures of sight and sense; and if material things help us to worship, let us use them, by all means.

It is not there that the danger lies, but in those other idols of flesh and blood that get possession of us, body and soul; the idols to whom we cry 'My God' when they have no similitude to Him.

There is very little danger, nowadays, of overmuch devotion to a crucifix, or to the Christ, whom it represents, and we might not be the worse for a little more 'creeping to the Cross' in all humility. It is better to worship a 'Dead Christ' than a living Satan!

CHAPTER VII

'FLESH POTS OF EGYPT'

THERE are certain natures to whom outward excitement is soothing and necessary. It counteracts their inward restlessness, and takes them out of themselves. Amid the stir of life around them they feel that they are achieving great things. Father Methuen belonged to this class, and therefore every phase of London life was dear to him, from the point of view of a spectator.

The neighbourhood of S. Paul's, with its ecclesiastical centre, round which flowed the busy tide of city life, and its literary background of Paternoster Row; the elegant stream of fashion flowing westward, each in its way represented life to the Father, and a life which was soothing because it had no claims on him. Even the East End, as seen from the outside, was picturesque. Whether on a closer acquaintance, his artistic soul would not have revolted from the mingled odour of fried fish, and bird fanciers' shops, was a question that would probably never be solved, for the Father, not having come to London for the purpose of improving his acquaint-

ance with the people, preferred them at a distance! He had always shown a marked preference for the pretty children and the clean old women, and had left the dirty, disagreeable cases to Philmore, for whom he said it was 'good practice.' What he wanted at present was to feel himself part of the throbbing life of the great city; close to its beating heart; one with the surging mass of humanity; one, that is, by imagination only, for to enter truly into the lives of others, we must possess unselfishness, and Father Methuen had less of that superhuman quality than most people.

On coming to London he had formed no definite plans for the future. He wanted first to drift unknown on the great human tide—to plunge into a vortex of life and forget the past, with what he was pleased to term its littlenesses.

He would not face the doubt at present as to whether he was what he appeared to the world, a man who, for conscience' sake, had resigned a position which he could no longer consistently hold; who had abandoned 'creed for honest doubt,' or that other unadmirable person which he sometimes appeared to himself, when he was forced to investigate his own motives. A man who had used his religious doubts as a peg on which to hang his resignation; as an excuse to cover his hankering after the 'flesh-pots of Egypt!'

There was in him, as there is in most lazy-bodied

people, a sensuous enjoyment of the pleasures of life, unknown to the active neurotic type, a something that longed for the employment of every faculty—the realisation of every sense, a panting for life in its fullest sense, which is not necessarily its highest. A voice had called to him, but it was not the voice of duty.

Arrived at Charing Cross, he booked his rooms at the Metropole, and, after leaving his belongings there—strolled leisurely down the Strand, staring vaguely into the Lowther Arcade, and thereby exciting the hopes of the stall-girls, who thought he looked like the father of a family and the probable purchaser of a 'tin gee-gee.'

He smiled to himself. They were not far wrong. He had been the father of a very large family, but he had turned his back on his children, and what was he now? Pshaw! he was a man who had done a very fine thing; who, instead of smothering his doubts, as so many did nowadays, had faced them boldly. and in so doing had conferred an immense benefit on another. The Father was very fond of dwelling on the enormous advantage that would accrue to Philmore from stepping into his shoes. He had been the making of that young man he told himself. Poor Philmore, how absurdly fond of him the boy had been, to be sure, and yet he had not wished him good-bye! He could not afford to upset himself, and the young fool would not look on matters in the right light, but, instead of being grateful to his benefactor, had persisted in posing as the injured party! The thought of his face irritated the Father. But then, he argued, there had always been a singular want of moral backbone about the Infant in spite of all that he had done to strengthen his coadjutor's character!

Methuen had strolled on now as far as Bedford Street. He glanced at the publishers' plates on the doors. Should he take up literature as a profession? Surely, with his keen insight into character, and knack of expressing himself, he would be sure to succeed. He could embody his own experiences in print; but then the treadmill to be gone through first, the weary drudgery of toiling on in face of disappointment, would not be at all in his line. he decided that literature would not do. Then he wandered on down Henrietta Street, and in Grant Richards' window some art prints arrested his attention. Yes, that would suit him better; he had always been artistic; he had made sketches of the Infant, and of his little maid with her scarlet frock and dark locks.

Well, he must retrace his steps now for tabled'hôte. A good dinner, regardless of expense, would set him up. He could not help feeling better after all those courses with the mysterious names, that keep one on tenter-hooks till they arrive, and sometimes after they have arrived, and are swallowed!

Yes, the Father would not feel so adrift after dinner.

Dinner means a great deal to a man; and he would probably meet some nice people at the table-d'hôte: he always made friends everywhere.

After dinner he would look up some people he knew, and go to the theatre.

He need not trouble about doing anything at present. He would look around him first and see life a bit.

CHAPTER VIII

HIS MOTHER

'I WOULD take some notice of it, Francis; I would indeed—it's a scandalous letter!'

The words had a tentative sound; as if the speaker did not quite know what she was expected to say, and was trying to find out.

Father Philmore turned upon her irritably. 'How can one take any notice of an anonymous contribution?' he demanded. 'In this case I can make a pretty good guess at the source, but still——'

'Yes, yes, of course, Francis, I forgot,' said his mother soothingly. He frowned: there is something aggravating in being always borne with, and he wished his mother would not be so frightened of him. He knew it was his fault, but he visited it upon her all the same.

After thinking the matter out carefully, he had decided to have her to live with him at the parsonage. He must have some one, for Mrs. Crouch, as a house-keeper, left much to be desired! To begin with, she would try to look after him; a waste of energy on her part, as she only succeeded in making him cross.

However, Mrs. Crouch was a woman of her word; and having promised the Father to keep an eye on 'the young 'un,' she and John would do their best to save him from the error of his ways. They approached him very gingerly, as you would a wild beast, with the consciousness that he might bite or scratch at any moment: but they stuck to their guns, by which it will be seen that they had not yet learnt either to forget the old Father or to love the new one. the people of this small seaside town were very conservative, and Father Methuen was still a household As to their present vicar, they had word with them. always looked on him as a sort of conundrum. Only once they had hoped to find the answer, and now they had given it up.

Father Philmore had sisters and aunts and cousins, but all these relationships are dubious, and open to misconstruction. People will gossip, even about nothing, but more particularly about church matters, and most particularly about unmarried clergy.

After all, it is not much wonder that young 'priests' get called 'crabby,' since their every civil word is open to misconstruction; or that they are accused of unsociability, when to walk with any female, one might almost say between six and sixty, is to set the whole parish agog with speculation!

So what is a man to do—except have his mother?

People cannot very well gossip about your mother!

Father Philmore broke the news gently to Mrs.

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Crouch, who was so 'struck of a heap' that she could not think of a quotation, and then he went to fetch the lady, leaving her to digest it.

Mrs. Philmore was one of the meekest, most unobtrusive little women possible, whose existence seemed a perpetual apology for itself. It was strange that Providence had endowed her first with a large and masterful husband, and afterwards with a son of the same pattern! She loved them both with that subservient kind of affection which gives all and takes nothing, and is its own worst enemy.

Her husband, a big burly colonel, had taken her devotion very much for granted. It suited him, and in his bluff way he loved his shrimp of a wife, and, when in the humour, would reward her by a rough caress, thereby raising the little woman to the seventh heaven.

He was one of those men who think that the duty of woman begins and ends with her obligations to the opposite sex; that for his pleasure she is, and was created. 'Man,' he says, 'may or may not have been made for God, but that woman was made for man he has not the smallest doubt!' It generally happens that the more latitude a man of Colonel Philmore's stamp allows himself, the severer he is upon his wife's failure in the smallest particular! Not that little Mrs. Philmore had any thought of failing. There was no rebellion in her composition. She had done all that was expected of her from her

youth up with the utmost docility, even to swallowing nasty pills and powders—if only she had not looked so frightened about it! She accepted marriage in the same spirit of resignation, being quite content to slave for Colonel Philmore while he lived, and when he died and left her penniless, accepting both facts with equal submission.

Mrs. Philmore was, perhaps unconsciously, a genuine fatalist. With most people, fatalism is only another word for laziness. Prayer, they say, cannot alter the prearranged will of God; it is therefore nothing but waste of time and breath. So, instead of praying, they grumble, which takes just as much time and breath. They convert 'What is, is best,' into 'What is, must be, I suppose, but it's very hard, and I'd alter it if I could.' These are the spurious fatalists; Mrs. Philmore was the genuine article. She accepted meekly whatever Providence sent her, and called it her 'just deserts,' which as it was, Colonel Philmore proves at any rate that she was not exacting.

It never occurred to her to wonder why she, who expected nothing of life, should have had such a large pill administered to her in the shape of her husband.

There is something pathetic in such figures as hers, going meekly about a world that laughs at them. Perhaps if hell is paved with good intentions, heaven may have a niche in the 'jasper pavement,' for wasted affection!

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Mrs. Philmore, having transferred her affections from her late husband to her son, prepared to go home with him in her usual adaptable manner, but life with Father Philmore was to be another matter, as she very soon discovered. To begin with, he was irritable. Now, Colonel Philmore had not possessed nerves, so she did not understand the neurotic temperament. When he was cross, he blustered and swore. When he was good-tempered, he laughed loudly, and sometimes swore too, and under all circumstances he ate enormously.

Now, Father Philmore never swore—she caught herself wishing that he would sometimes, just to make things seem a little home-like—and he hardly ate anything. It made his mother miserable, and she made him equally so by perpetually worrying him about it. She did not understand him in the least, but then nobody did, so that was not wonderful. She prayed that she might some day, and that if not, she might come to regard him in the light of a cross; but one does not want to look upon one's only son as a cross, if it is not absolutely necessary.

His mother was a very decided cross to Father Philmore; he was the sort of man who looks on relations as something to be borne, and what irritated him more than anything was the meek way in which she took his snubbings. He did not want to be sharp with her, and he found himself longing for her to fly out at him as he knew he deserved.

Then there was Mrs. Crouch. She had received the new-comer in the hall, wearing her best cap, and holding her head well up in the air, while John hovered in the background. The vicar knew the signs by heart.

Mrs. Crouch had determined to ascertain at once what her footing would be for the future. It had been bad enough to stand the vicar's tantrums and orderings, but to take his commands second hand, through another woman, not if she knew it! And to have this woman poking her nose into holes and corners 'where she hadn't no business,' which meant holes and corners dedicated to Mrs. Crouch and untidiness, and to any 'sundries' which she might look upon as lawful perquisites. 'Tain't likely as she'll keep in her place. They do say "fools rush in where angels dare to tread," and she looks a fool, every inch of her. Nobody belonging to vicar could be much of an angel! Not but what he looks like one, dressed up, but when you come to live with him——'

On the whole, Mrs. Crouch was glad that the vicar's mother looked a fool. She went upstairs presently to take further stock and make sure. Mrs. Philmore was taking off her things in the bedroom prepared for her. A bare little room, sparsely furnished, in which Mrs. Crouch had grudgingly placed the merest necessaries of life, and as few of them as possible.

It was a cold welcome. Mrs. Crouch stood and watched the little woman whose back was towards

her. She was taking off her bonnet with small, thin, trembling hands, and an apologetic air.

Mrs. Crouch coughed loudly to announce her presence. She was not going to begin knocking at doors, as if she was a servant, at her time of life.

Little Mrs. Philmore turned round; she had not heard the cough, being too absorbed in her own thoughts,—but she felt that some one was behind her, and it made her nervous. 'Is—Father Philmore waiting for me?' she asked hesitatingly.

'Who?' It is impossible to describe the scorn which Mrs. Crouch managed to throw into that word. The gentle little woman resenting the tone, and missing the respectful prefix, drew herself up with some dignity.

'I mean my son,' she said.

'Oh,' with a laugh, 'he isn't "Father" to us. Leastways, I don't call him so. He hasn't no claim to the title that I'm aware of.'

'No, no; of course,' said Mrs. Philmore apologetically. In her heart she agreed with Mrs. Crouch, though she resented her way of expressing herself. That lady went to the washstand and pretended to busy herself putting things straight, as an excuse for staying. She glanced round the bare little room and back at the vicar's mother, and her grim face relaxed with what she considered the pity of a strong nature for a weak. Tyranny and bluster are too often mistaken, by their possessors, for strength.

Mrs. Couch did not quite like to sit down, so after wandering aimlessly round the toilet-table, and 'tidying it' by means of sticking the wrong combs in the brushes, she propped herself against the wall with every intention of opening a conversation. She had weighed the new-comer, and found her infinitely inferior to herself, therefore she could afford to be amiable.

But behold, Mrs. Philmore was moving towards the door with culpable indifference to her condescension. As a matter of fact, she had not recognised it as such, for she could not have hurt the feelings of a fly. Hers was a case in which the harmlessness of the dove is as useful as the wisdom of the serpent.

'I think,' she said, 'that it must be tea-time, so if you will show me the way——'

Mrs. Crouch was deeply insulted. 'I've the ways of my household to see to,' she said with an indignant sniff, 'and the stranger within the gates must look after himself. I don't eat the bread of idleness, I can tell you. Straight down and turn to the left. You can't miss it. Leastways, as "the Father," mockingly, 'will be there for a high watermark.' She meant land-mark. 'Not but what I was about to give you several hints, which, having had the management of him for so long, it isn't likely you'll get off any one else.'

Mrs. Philmore actually had the audacity to smile. 'Another time,' she said gently, as she moved away.

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She intended to be very pleasant, but Mrs. Crouch was furious. Her overtures had been rejected; she had humbled herself for nothing, and she shook her fist at the retreating figure. 'Another time!' she said; 'don't she wish she may get it? When she has a convenient season, I suppose, like Paul or Cephas, I forget which.' Mrs. Crouch's Bible-reading left something to be desired. 'Well, anyway,' she added, 'I've done my duty. Now I can say with Jehu, What have I to do with peace? Get thee behind me, Satan!'

CHAPTER IX

'NOT UNDERSTANDED OF THE PEOPLE'

THE vicar sat waiting for his mother. Tea was ready; he had made it himself to-night, as neither she nor Mrs. Crouch had volunteered to do so.

He was sitting in the same room in which he had sat with Methuen two years ago; he had kept to the old study, which looked strangely tidy now without the Father's collection of odds and ends, artistic and otherwise.

People had remarked at first that the new vicar was dazed by his exalted position. As Mrs. Crouch said, he was 'as a dream when one awaketh.' A characteristic quotation, because the whole point of the matter lay in the fact that, try as he might, he could *not* awake.

Father Philmore was still young enough to imagine that because he had hurt himself rather badly he would never recover; that because his first experience had been a failure, everything, including himself, ought to come to an abrupt standstill. It seemed a dreadful thing to him that matters should improve as time went on, but they did—they always do. First

we think the sun heartless for shining, then we find ourselves as heartless as the sun; afterwards we cease to worry over it at all. He was right in a way, though; our first experiences do not disappear; they only get hidden deep down out of sight in some inner receptacle of our being, where, as time goes on, they get other experiences to keep them company. The mistake Father Philmore made was in thinking the game was up for him when it was He was feeling at present only just beginning. the blank which invariably comes when we lose a support of any kind to which we have clung. is always a breathing-time before we go on to the next that is waiting for us a little bit higher up the path. We must all cling to something on our way through life to death, and it makes little difference what it is; only when we cling too hard, we stick by the way, and therefore 'the destiny which shapes our ends' has to dislodge us, lest finding our heaven on earth, we become fixtures. 'Move on,' cries Providence, 'on from the snug nest you have been carefully feathering for yourself, and some one else probably. Out of the loving arms that you thought were always to enfold you. Out of the warm corner -into the cold blast. No halting here!' And Providence had spoken, policemanwise, to Father Philmore; only, never having been told to move on before, he mistook his first halting-place for his last.

There were times at first when his whole being

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seemed absorbed in the sense of missing; when his soul went out to his absent friend, and yearned for him with a sick, hungry longing that was absolute physical pain—anxious days and sleepless nights, when he would have moved heaven and earth to discover how he had failed; what he had done or left undone that this had come upon him; when he would have given the whole world for the old familiar friendship—for a touch of the Father's hand and a sound of his voice.

'My son!' The words rang in his ears and knelled in his heart persistently, and to dull the gnawing hunger there came not a word. The Father never wrote.

Perhaps it was better—for as time went on, these periods became less frequent. It is a humiliating fact, but our mutable human nature cannot live on remembrance. Certain things and people come into our lives, colour them strongly, and then drop out of them, and become merely episodes. It must be so; it is part of the law of change, part of the unsatisfactoriness of ourselves, and the instability of our surroundings. In some cases the dropping out is a gradual process, and we are hardly conscious of it: the thing or person dies a natural death. Sometimes the change comes in the midst of our fever heat, and we cry out loudly, and stretch impotent hands to the vanishing, not only of the beloved object, but of a state of things which can never return again. We

don't like it. There is something in us that rebels against this marking off our life by mile-stones, but we can't help it. In vain we say that we will not forget; we will keep in touch; we will say it is, and not it was. We are powerless. It is not forgetfulness; the affection is still there, but the old order has changed, giving place to the new.

Again, as in Philmore's case, the sweetness passes, and the bitterness remains—a hard, sore spot, deep down, at which we seldom look, though we know it is there.

Father Philmore had 'got over it,' as people say, but the effect remained. The headstone of the grave of his first faith, and his first love!

He was very busy as time went on. His duties were manifold, and he was not the man to leave one undone. The Father's words had come true. The vicar was not popular; people said he neither tried nor wished to be. . . .

In the pulpit he held them by his eloquence as of old. There were no sick unvisited in his parish. In fact, in his official capacity he was perfection. As a man he was immensely respected. No one had a word to say against him, only they did not love him. It was his own fault. His mother's attitude was reflected in that of his parishioners—they were afraid of him. How could they know that he wanted to be loved, that his heart was starving on their cold regard, that he asked bread and they gave him a stone?

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They did not hear him in the solitude of his own chamber, crying in bitterness, that he would barter all their respect for one iota of the love they gave the erring Father.

He wished, almost fiercely sometimes, that they did not think him so good, since goodness seemed to set one on a pinnacle above all human ken. caught himself wondering whether, if he cultivated some vice, such as drink, he would be more popular. Some of the women loved their drunken husbands: great brutes that beat them! Yes, it was evident that to be popular one must be rather vicious. Then he would pull himself up, smiling at his own absurdity. For had he not told the Father that he did not want to be popular; that from his point of view, failure, in the ordinary sense, was success, and vice versa? He remembered waxing quite grandiloquent on the subject. Had he tired already of his self-chosen path? Poor Father Philmore, he was finding out that it is not good for man to be alone; but it was a useless discovery, because he was one of the people who are always alone.

There were those among the sick and dying who had not only discovered that Philmore possessed a heart, but had come very near to it, who had had glimpses of what the man could be.

He was at his best in a sick-room. There was something in him, that the Father had called morbidness, that responded to the call of sorrow; a

certain kinship with suffering that only suffering can teach.

No matter that when he went out from the sick-room he took up again his old repellent manner, his icy cloak of reserve: people who had known him in times of trouble were not misled by it. No wonder that he liked sick-rooms—he had his satisfaction there; that satisfaction on this earth for which our human nature craves.

In the cup of cold water which he held to dying lips, the great and perpetual thirst of his own heart was quenched.

No matter what people in general thought of him, when dying lips blessed him, and dying eyes watched for his coming. Ah, the popular people who count their adorers by the score, and think as lightly of adulation as of the air they breathe, can never know how precious to the unpopular man is the word of approval and the look of love. How jealously he guards his few crumbs, lest they, out of their abundance, should take them from him. No one wanted Father Philmore but the sick and dying, and they never had to ask for him twice; in fact, they seldom had to ask at all.

One day, when he was sitting with a very disagreeable old man, who had made life as unpleasant as he could for eighty years to himself and those about him, and was now passing out of it, to the intense relief of his family, he received a left-handed compliment.

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Old Sam was 'passing fond o' vicar.' For one thing the vicar called him Sam, and not 'Crusty,' in which appropriate cognomen his baptismal appellation had been lost sight of. Then no one moved him like 'vicar,' and no one shook up his pillows 'so comfuble.' In fact, no one but 'vicar' must touch him, and no one did. The vicar had not many privileges, and those he had he guarded jealously. Not that in this case the family showed the least desire to take the nursing out of his hands. In fact, they all retired thankfully and precipitately when he appeared.

The vicar had a sort of sympathy with old Sam. He could fancy himself a very similar old man in days to come, so he bore very patiently with the petulance that had not much longer to fret itself and other people.

Sam had been lying very quiet one evening; except that the brown toil-worn hands with their dirty nails wandered restlessly about. The vicar saw it, and noted also the pallor of his face, through the sunburnt skin, and the dampness of the stray white hairs—that no one was allowed to keep in order.—'Here, Sam, let me prop you up a bit.' Sam was in pain, and to any one else he would have said, 'Don't touch me,' and something else, but a pain more or less did not matter where 'vicar' was concerned. So he kept silent. Then, as the vicar was moving him, Sam looked up. 'Well,' he said,

'I don't see as you're stuck up and 'aughty. Leastways, you ain't to me.' The hand that was arranging the pillows paused suddenly, and the vicar hated himself for the pang that shot through him. 'That's all right, Sam,' he said cheerfully, 'it's you that are stuck up now, anyway.' 'And I says,' continued Sam, 'says I, we all speak as we find, and if you see anything to dislike in vicar, I doesn't—quite the contrary.' After this overwhelming compliment he lay back exhausted.

The vicar had moved away from Sam, and stood with his back to him. 'Do they dislike me, then?' he asked casually, veiling the eagerness of his tone. Sam nodded oracularly. 'Most on 'em,' he said feebly, 'cept me and a few.'

The vicar was silent. Sam had wounded him pretty severely, if unconsciously, and it seemed hard after all he had done for him. Yet it is always best to know the truth, and after all, what was it to him; but another step in that welcome ladder of failure, that was to lead him upwards to success? Only he, with eyes cast down, was hankering after the applause of men! . . .

'Vicar, you ain't offended—be you?' He crossed hastily to the bed. 'No, no, Sam, it's all right.' Sam looked relieved. 'That's well,' he gasped; 'now I can die—easy.' Poor Sam, he could not die easy, even now. Life had been hard, but death was harder. The unknown evil is always

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worse than the known: the naughtiest boy in the school does not anticipate a summons to the head-master's room, and Sam looked upon death in much the same light.

'I be going,' he said, 'to get my deserts.'

Poor Sam, he had found mercy with unmerciful man, and surely the All-Merciful would not fall short!

'It's all right, Sam,' said the vicar. Then Sam looked up in his pain. 'Remember,' he said, 'I always stood up for you! Lord knows you've been powerful kind to me, and I love you.'

I love you! It was his cup of cold water, his dying confession to the only God he knew; so perhaps, as the vicar said, it would be 'all right' for him. Perhaps as he had learned to love so late in this world, he would be allowed to complete his lesson in the next!

CHAPTER X

'HIS HEART'S DESIRE AND LEANNESS'

'IT's a vexed question, Lorrimer. Success and failure are very mixed terms. One man's meat—you know the rest! Anyway, happiness is the goal of all, and no man is a failure who is happy in his own way. It therefore follows that no outsider can judge.'

. Father Methuen had tried finding happiness 'in his own way' for eight years, and the result had left him very much where it found him, except considerably poorer.

He had made London his headquarters, and had plunged into the vortex of gay life at once. He knew plenty of the best people, and invitations had poured in upon him. Enough of his story was known to make him interesting, and he had had his fill of everything among the 'upper ten.' He had been to afternoon receptions, where the men were scarce, and the ladies had to pretend that they enjoyed each other's society, and to take their revenge afterwards in merciless criticism of their female neighbours; and to evening receptions, where

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the men were not so scarce, and the women could therefore enjoy themselves without pretence, if that is possible. There were also receptions where you must have *done* something to be admitted. It did not particularly matter what; if you were a little wicked even, it was better than nothing. The hostesses were usually ladies in high life whose latest craze was to appear 'bohemian.' They called it patronising art; but art occasionally refused to be patronised.

Father Methuen's claim to an invitation was somewhat vague: it was based on the fact of his being either a hero or a 'nice naughty man with objectionable views.' No one quite knew which. At any rate he went, and he met there, as he might have expected, the quasi-bohemians, the third-rate actors and artists and writers, half-and-half sort of people, who reached after art with one hand, and society with the other, and wanted a little of both; who were not above toadying to their hostess and of hearing her say afterwards that 'these sort of people were not half bad when they got over their shyness.'

There were plenty of these, but the genuine article was conspicuous by its absence! The successful artiste having 'arrived,' can afford to decline patronage with or without thanks, or rather, he thinks the patronage is the other way about. He has something better to do than be put through his pace for a whim of Lady Anybody's.

It therefore happened that the real bohemian element was missing, and Methuen's soul sickened. There was in him a something which revolted from society proper, which craved the licence of familiar intercourse where you can turn yourself inside out. He was not the man to commit vulgar excesses; they jarred upon his sense of fitness, but he hated conventionality; he longed for that dubious privilege of being able to speak your mind, which belongs only to intimacy. It was strange that, in spite of his capacity for friendship, he had made no new friends in these years. He retained his old fascination for men younger than himself-Claude Lorrimer was an example of it—but he never voluntarily exercised it now. Neither had he done anything special in the way of work. He had discovered that it is one thing to shine in one's own private circle of admiring friends, and quite another before the public. In fact, that to do anything moderately well nowadays involved an amount of steady plodding that was not at all in his line. He had not yet discovered what was in his line! His sketches, he had been told, were not without merit, but he ought to 'go in for it thoroughly'; and he was not at all sure that he wanted to go in for it, or for anything else, thoroughly.

So he had drifted along, doing little and meditating much. Occasionally selling a picture for a ridiculously low sum, or getting an article accepted by some Magazine, and now he was pulled up by the

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fact that his money was getting short, as money has a way of doing when everything goes out and nothing comes in!

He had lived in expensive chambers at first, and given bachelor dinners, and yachting parties, but that had soon come to an end, and since then he had been sinking lower and lower from a pecuniary point of view, though his rooms were still a paradise of comfort to the impecunious Claude Lorrimer, and various other youths of similar stamp, who had helped him off with his money to a considerable extent. Father Methuen knew perfectly that the I O U's given, in some cases, in all good faith, meant absolutely nothing; but he had not lost their friendship, naturally, because he generally solved the difficulty of payment by making the loan a gift.

It had struck Claude Lorrimer lately that Methuen was not so well appointed as he used to be. He had always affected the negligent style, but now his velvet coat was shabby and his whole appearance careless. Lorrimer did not like it; he was a shiftless, happy-go-lucky bohemian himself, but he recognised a different element in Methuen, and he knew that when a man, such as he, ceases to care about his personal appearance, it is a bad sign.

The Father was still closely shaven, but he had allowed his curly hair to grow, and it was thickly streaked with grey.

He was very quiet to-day. Lunch had not revived

him from his fit of the blues, though it had been a very good one: better than he could afford, as Father Methuen's lunches generally were.

Something Lorrimer had said had sent his thoughts back to his conversation with the 'Infant' about success and failure. He was reviewing those eight years. Not even from a worldly standpoint could they be considered a success. He had swept aside all obstacles to self-gratification. No worrying duties that must be done; no tiresome young mentor ever at his side, unconsciously reproaching him by his straighter life, had marred his chances of enjoying life to the full, and yet he had gained neither fame nor happiness. A failure, he had told the Infant, was a man who skirted success all his life, but failed to enter the charmed circle; how strange that his words should find a fulfilment in himself! He wondered what Philmore had made of these years. He wanted to see the Infant very much to-night. It would be too absurd if that quixotic young enthusiast should have been doing real solid work, while he, the keenwitted man of the world, had dreamed the time away.

Anyway, it would be interesting to compare notes; but probably Philmore's devotion to himself had been a passing youthful folly which had burned itself out, as the Father had prophesied that it would. Otherwise some words must have reached him during all these years. He was quite forgetting that he

himself had severed all means of communication between them by giving no address! He forgot everything to-night except his overpowering wish that the Infant could look in, and poke the fire in the old way.

Ah, the Father was proving the universal truth that when we scorn a good thing, we live to want it! There is nothing more precious than love, and eternal economy does not allow it to be wasted, neither does eternal justice suffer those who waste it to go unrequited! The day comes that what they scorned in their plenty, they long for in their famine. And the day had come to Father Methuen.

'I say, Methuen, are you seedy?'

The Father returned to the present with a start.

'No. I was only thinking that if you want an example of failure, Lorrimer, here's your man.' He struck his chest smiling.

Lorrimer was genuinely surprised, and alarmed. He looked on the Father as a man of means, who had no occasion to work, but who could, if he chose, command the world.

'Look here, Methuen, you must be ill. Don't talk of failure; it's a beastly subject. We all manage to worry through somehow, and have a good time, thanks to you.'

Methuen looked at him dreamily. Lorrimer was a very ordinary example of the 'eat, drink, and be

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merry' class; with no religion and not too many morals. Plenty of dare devilry and ready goodnature, and purely physical good looks.

Well, here was an example of success of a sort. A limited sort, certainly, and one that Methuen would once have scorned, but, in his present stage, any sort was better than no sort. 'You ought to succeed, boy,' he said.

Lorrimer roared, 'I! That's the unkindest cut of all! Well, I haven't much ambition, luckily for me! Given enough for daily bread, life isn't a bad thing, so away dull care! I say,' as a child's figure passed the window, 'that's a pretty girl.'

'It's one of my models,' said Methuen.

CHAPTER XI

FORTUNE'S WHEEL

METHUEN had models occasionally. It was good practice, and gave him an opportunity of studying life at the same time.

They were generally much of a muchness, these models. Representatives of a class—a somewhat maligned class, by the way; for, after all, a model is a necessity, like some other dubious institutions, and it is therefore fairer to blame the demand and not the supply.

Father Methuen had ceased to be interested in his models, except as specimens of the particular physical point for which he chose them; a perfect arm, or a well-poised head, or a pretty foot, as the case might be. At first he had encouraged them to talk, but their conversation soon palled upon him. They spoke as they found, poor things, with a broad freedom which was all they knew. The generality of them were quite free from vice, only they called a 'spade a spade,' because, in their world, that was the fashion. The artistic veiling which makes dubious

topics palatable to a mind like Methuen's was unknown to them.

Methuen's latest fancy was to reproduce the face of his little maid at the door of the 'Catholic Church'; in fact, the whole scene. His mind had dwelt very much on it lately. It was an ambitious subject, but he was no mere dabbler; he had artistic talent, almost amounting to genius, if only he would have cultivated it, instead of waiting for an inspiration that never came.

Methuen's present model did not satisfy him at all. She possessed the outward semblance of the child as he remembered her, except that she was older, but the uninteresting personality of the girl irritated him. He could not realise his little maid in her. ascended the stairs to-day, with no lightening of his weary mood; but as he opened the studio door, he wondered for a moment if the wine he had taken had unsteadied his brain, for Martha, his present model, had always worn the regulation scarlet frock. then, as he turned the handle, did he realise so vividly the open church door, blocked by the figures of himself and the child; the sunshine outside, and the cool freshness of the dim light within! the outward peace of that sanctuary! No wonder it had tempted the child. 'May I go into your Catholic Church?' His Catholic Church. Poor little maid!...

What a fool he was to stand there, dreaming while the model waited! She was leaning against the window, looking at the unfinished picture on the easel. She had actually uncovered it, he perceived, and was gazing with an interest very unlike the ordinary stolidity of models, at every detail! This surely, he thought, was the ideal model for which he had hungered. A model with a soul above filthy lucre, and equally filthy conversation, and possessing some notion of the dignity of her calling.

She started as he came forward, probably frightened at her own temerity in uncovering the picture. 'Martha couldn't come to-day,' she said, 'and so she sent me to see if I would do.' Methuen coughed, and muttered something. 'You'll do,' he said curtly, and began arranging her without further preliminaries. He felt inspired; the picture would be a success. What good fortune had sent this girl to him?

He motioned to her where to stand without touching her. She did not need so much arranging as most models, although she was such a child.

Was she a child, though? She was considerably older than his little maid, and the slim figure had a weary droop that was not altogether childish.

She was quite unformed at present, but gave promise, under favourable circumstances, of developing an almost tropical redundance of life. The hands and arms and throat were beautifully moulded, but there was a half-starved appearance about her which Methuen instantly set down to the chafing of a naturally refined nature in uncongenial surroundings.

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The full lips pouted childishly at his close scrutiny, and the dark eyes looked straight at him with all the well-remembered confidence of his little maid, and a something beside. No girl who is about the London streets can remain a child at heart; at least she learns the instinct of self-preservation.

This one might be about sixteen, Methuen thought, as he scraped the palette in silence. He felt that she was different, in some way, from the ordinary run of models, and dreaded lest she should speak and break the spell.

She was not at all nervous. He wondered if she was used to this kind of work, and hoped not, and yet what business was it of his? Then as time went on, he ceased to notice her. His thoughts were back in the past—busy with himself as he then was. self, as described in the words of the child, which only echoed the opinion of his small world, 'You're such a nice man.' How lightly he had estimated it Now, after his abode among the husks and swine, it had the value of the unattainable! Well, he had drifted away from it all of his own free will! Away from human fellowship, from the calls of a common life, away from everything but himself, and he had not found himself at all a 'nice man' during these eight years. He was more weary of his own company to-day, than he had ever been of Father Philmore and the Catholic Church!

Well, at any rate, he would paint a good picture

this time. How the girl stared, and how very like she was to his little maid!

He put his brushes down and came towards her, pursued still by that haunting doubt. 'My child, why do you look at me? Have you ever seen me before?' She reddened and held her head down, as if rebuked.

'Look at me now,' he said. 'Tell me how you like the Catholic Church.' The words acted like magic. She clapped her hands, and his little maid of old stood before him.

'Oh,' she said, 'I remember now. You're the man who let me in, but'—and she glanced expressively at his dress, and the brushes in his hand.

'But,' he said, finishing her sentence for her, 'I let myself out.'

Elfrida was silent. She held her head down, so that he could not see her face. 'Sit down, little one, you're too big to be nursed now. Talk to me. Tell me if you have found life "sweets to the sweet."'

She blushed. A good sign, Methuen thought, for models, as a rule, do not blush. Then she told her story. A common one enough. A father of gentle blood, and a mother of the servant class. The usual hankering after forbidden fruit, and the usual result of satiety. A father conspicuous by his absence. Elfrida could not remember him. Her mother, just before the child's birth, had been sent by some well-intentioned person to a rescue Home, where the

teaching was what is commonly called 'High Church.' While there she had fallen under the influence of the chaplain and the sisters, who did their best for her, by means of rosaries and crucifixes and devotional pictures. They also procured her a situation when she left the Home, where they hoped their influence would be continued, but in this they were mistaken. The personal element of attraction was missing, and the old Eve broke out anew in Elfrida's mother.

It was one thing to be penitent in a Home where you were made much of in a certain way. The way of being encouraged to talk of your sins, and thereby to feel yourself a person of importance, if a sinner, and quite another to drudge in a situation where they esteemed it a great kindness to have taken you at all!

So thought Elfrida's mother, and therefore she ran away, taking her baby with her. Having boarded the child with a woman of her acquaintance, she obtained a situation as barmaid, and since then she had been going from bad to worse. There was no affection between the parent and child, but the woman knew that the girl's pretty face was marketable, and therefore she kept an eye upon her.

Elfrida dwelt upon her mother's present occupation with a fulness of detail which the conventional young lady might have omitted, but she told the whole story simply enough. It did not strike her as pathetic or

uncommon. It was just a relation of facts; the hard facts of her own life, and, for all she knew, of other people's lives too; and she was not far out.

While she was speaking, her words kept recurring to Methuen's mind, 'I should like to confess to you,' and he thought of the strange irony of fate which had, after all, brought the girl with the story of her short sad life to the guide she had chosen in her childish ignorance. And what a guide! If destiny seemed driving her to the devil, he was going of his own free will. If hers were sins of ignorance, his were sins against light!

'Poor little child,' said Methuen. After all, she was only a child still, his little maid, grown taller and sadder. 'Then you have never been a model before?' he said.

- 'Never, till Martha asked me; but I was glad to come.'
 - 'Why?' asked Methuen.
 - 'Because I wanted the money.'
 - 'The money!' he repeated.
 - 'I was hungry,' said Elfrida simply.
- 'Hungry!' Methuen was shocked. While he had lived in the clouds, dreaming of the past, the child had been actually hungry. Her starved appearance was due not to the yearnings of an artistic nature for the Infinite, with a large 'I,' as he had imagined, but to the actual bodily pangs of hunger.

He took her downstairs, and she had a meal,

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which lingered in her memory for many a day, side by side with that tea in the vicar's study long ago. And after that meal the sparkle came back to her eyes, and she looked again like the roguish little maid who had stormed the Catholic Church.

Such prosaic creatures are we, after all.

CHAPTER XII

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

IT was an old habit of Methuen's to burn the midnight oil. He was the sort of man who feels best at night, mentally and physically, and he liked to sit up and enjoy the fact—to set his thoughts of the day in order while the rest of the world slept.

Philmore had occasionally shared these vigils, but not often; for one cannot burn the candle at both ends, and it suited Methuen that his coadjutor should be 'early to rise.' Of late years Claude Lorrimer and his companions had often dropped in, and on these occasions the meetings had not been of a meditative character; but, whether alone or in company, Methuen never went to bed early.

He sat up later than usual on the night of Elfrida's reappearance, penning a letter to an old friend; a man who, like many of Methuen's friends, owed him a debt of gratitude for a start in life at a time when every one else passed by on the other side. Methuen had always preferred the sinners to the 'just persons.' He would say laughingly to Philmore that his mission was to the black sheep. They interested

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him more, he said. The question was which interested him, the sin or the sinner!

This man had paid his debt, like most of Methuen's protégés, by the warmest affection. It was strange how lucky he was in this respect. It is seldom that a person one has helped remains one's friend, probably because we spoil our favours too often by our way of doing them. In Methuen's case the practical kindness was joined to a personal attraction which made the receiving of it a pleasure, and so the bond was cemented. He never lost sight of any one he had helped. In this case the man's brilliant genius had attracted him and turned his sympathy into friendship.

'It is strange,' ran the letter, 'how little we know ourselves until a sudden temptation reveals some weakness whose very existence we should have scornfully denied, or an unexpected emergency developes the most surprising capacities which we never imagined we possessed. The large and diverse human family is swayed, after all, by the same ruling passions. Its component parts are the same, though differently mixed in each individual. In some, as in Philmore, there is the combination of angel and fiend with very little of the human; again, as in the case of your humble servant, we have a very human development—the love of life; the pleasure in all created things, and its attendant evils. Half of us is akin to the beasts that perish, if

only we were not so ashamed of it! But our civilisation is all askew; we are blinded by conventionality. We blush at the way we are made, and draw a veil of mock-modesty-over the laws of nature, as demonstrated in ourselves; while there is in most of us a morbid love of dubious topics, a lingering on dangerous and debatable ground, a playing with edged tools; in fact, a dressing-up of vice to look interesting, and then a pampering of her which has been called the "malady of modernity." As a matter of fact, it has always existed, since it made Eve eat the apple, only nowadays, like everything else, it is dragged to the light, and analysed and dissected by our wonderful modern processes which leave nothing unrevealed!

'Eve would not have required to eat the apple nowadays; we have grown beyond such primitive ways of acquiring knowledge, thanks to the Board Schools and modern novelists! Poor Eve, what a happy time she would have had in this enlightened century when a thirst for knowledge is so applauded! True, before the days of her fig-leaf apron, she might have scandalised such old-fashioned people as have not yet been educated above their narrow-minded prejudice in favour of clothes, but otherwise she would have been in all respects one of ourselves.

'How humiliating, though, to be discovered doing the very same thing, in this age of progress, that she was doing at the beginning of everything, and without a bit more hope of success! Yes, we are still thirsting to know good from evil, wisdom from folly, pleasure from pain, only we are rather mixed as to which is which. And we are all much of a much-Between the people who do the objectionable things, and the people who discover them; between the writer of the modern sex-novel and the horrified British matron whose outraged virtue does not prevent her from reading it, "just to have an opinion," there is not such a very wide gulf. Sometimes to see evil is worse than to do it; in fact, it is only a balked form of the latter. The girl who takes an interest in "Rescue Homes," the student who spends his days bending his back and ruining his eyesight over profound research, and the child who breaks his drum open to see where the sound comes from, are all clearly allied. They are just human beings protesting against the way they are made—and marred. Beating against the bars of their "prison house," and the glass through which they "see darkly "-Creation groaning and travailing at its "mortal coils," at the limitations imposed by the flesh on the immortal spirit, at the limitation imposed by the laws of God and man on the unruly flesh!

'Why is the Roman priest so devoted to his religion, but because it is a vent for the sensuous feelings which he is supposed to suppress in other ways? He is presumably dead to the love of women, so he lavishes his devotion on a pictured Madonna. A

monk's most extravagant homage is paid to the Virgin Mary, while a nun reserves her tenderest devotion for the Infant Saviour. Why? His feelings are denied their normal outlet. Her arms are empty of what should naturally fill them. The result is Don't misunderstand me. I am not saying obvious. that religious feeling has its root in sensuality, but that mere sensuous feeling is not religion, and that its existence in religion shows an abnormal state of The earthly, having no vent, intrudes itself into what should be purely heavenly. You cannot give the love intended for the creature to the Creator without unintentionally mocking Him. composed, in equal parts, of the divine and human, and if either be denied fair play, it revenges itself! Come what may we must fulfil the law of our being, the God-given, man-perverted law. "Male and female created he them."

'What am I driving at, you will say. I am not mad, my friend, but only suffering from the common complaint of having thought myself rather superior to the rest of the world, and not much liking the discovery that I am just the same!

'Are you a believer in what pious folk call the leadings of Providence, and other extraordinary coincidences? Some one whom I never expected to see again has crossed my path unexpectedly without any doing of mine. Am I responsible for the consequences? If we believed in prayer, I should ask you

to pray for me; but we don't, in the common acceptation of the word. We have asked in faith! and, literally speaking, we have not received! Luckily for us, very likely, but that is outside the question. We doubt not the wisdom of God in withholding, but the possibility of logical human beings continuing to ask, with confidence of having, in face of such withholding! What is predestined for us from all eternity, that we shall have, without any asking. Nay, more, our most impassioned pleading cannot avert the waves of destiny. Think of me, then, as kindly as you can, for who shall resist the incoming tide!'

CHAPTER XIII

'GOD OR MAMMON'

A strange sense of wellbeing pervaded Methuen as the days went on, which he did not choose to analyse. One cannot drag every feeling into the light of criticism, and it is strange how very retiring, in this respect, our own pet weaknesses usually are.

It was enough for Methuen that his picture was progressing; he would not go beyond that. If, meanwhile, he was doing a philanthropic action in helping a destitute child, and it made him happy, why, all the better surely! Happiness had not come too readily at his bidding of late. So he argued, when he argued at all; he did not allow himself much time for it.

The picture grew rapidly under his fingers. It really seemed as if at last he had found his inspiration. There were certain technical faults, but it glowed with life. Naturally, when the central figure stood before him in the flesh! It was really a most unusual stroke of luck, he thought, that the child should have reappeared at that moment to help his imagination.

The picture meant much to Methuen. He had wanted to paint it for so long that it had become a sort of religion—a vent for certain feelings which he could not express. He painted his life into it. The dimly-lit church stood for the duties on which he had turned his back; the child with the sunshine on her face, for the pleasures to which he had sacrificed them.

The unfortunate thing was that, against his will, a look of the older Elfrida had crept into the child's face in the picture. It was almost impossible, while she stood before him, not to catch something of that new expression—the saddened look of one who knows; and it cast its shadow of prophetic meaning on the face of the child at the door of the Catholic Church.

'It is not all "pretty" things,' Methuen had told her; 'there are hard things too.' Ay, he had found them so hard that he had turned his back on them; she had accepted them gladly in her childish ignorance.

Methuen soon discovered, as men do discover, that at present the child was unharmed. Evil had passed her by as unfruitful ground. She was just a child of nature, knowing no wrong, and therefore thinking no shame. Her impulses were good, but she was all impulse; a young uncontrolled animal, and yet with a beautiful soul.

The knowledge of evil which circumstances had

taught her, had glided almost harmlessly from the surface of a nature that was innately pure. She had the natural innocence of a baby, joined to a knowledge that was almost pathetic, because she took it so much as a matter of course.

The days slipped on, and as the picture progressed, the child seemed to progress too. She made rapid strides towards womanhood while Methuen was painting her. She took to arranging her hair and dress—putting a flower here, and a ribbon there—and he, noting all this, fell back gradually into his old caressing ways. It was hard not to pet her. She liked it, and so did he, and they were both very lonely. Methuen pitied himself intensely for being so glad of her company, but he was glad of it; one can hardly help playing on an instrument which responds to every touch! It gave him the old sense of power to see how she hung on his words....

'So you think I'm a nice man still, Elfrida?' he said one day.

Her look was enough, but she added, 'I wish you hadn't left the Catholic Church!'

The hand that was ruthlessly rumpling her carefully arranged hair paused abruptly. 'Why?' he asked, quite sharply for him. She knitted her brows in the effort to explain.

The thought of the 'Catholic Church' and the man who had let her in, had grown up with her till, from a baby memory, it had become the most lasting impression of her life. Round it she had weaved visions and dreamt dreams till she hardly knew which was fact and which fancy. But Methuen had been always the leading figure; the holder of the keys of her paradise. Through him she hoped some day to enter her El Dorado, to tread that 'hallowed ground' whose precincts she had crossed with him. She associated him with it all, and now he had let himself out, and everything was spoiled. All of us who lead dull lives have our 'hallowed ground' into which we retire to dream; our floating mirage which lures us on; our own particular castle in the air, which would not be any one else's, or our own, perhaps, if it really came within reach. No matter, for it probably never will; meantime it helps to pass the dreary days. Lonely and imaginative children are particularly addicted to this sort of dreaming. When Elfrida wanted to 'feel good,' as she called it, she retired in imagination into the 'Catholic Church' and 'sniffed' the altar flowers.

Methuen had to wait a long time for his answer. She could not explain herself—could not say why she was disappointed. After all, he must know best. She was so ignorant, and he knew everything. If he had let himself out, it could not be a nice place. Why did she want to go there, and why were there tears in her eyes? He was looking at her so strangely, too; not like he used to look.

'Then you can't forgive sins now?' she faltered.

He held out his hands invitingly. 'I'll forgive yours, little one, if you'll forgive mine.' She shook her head impatiently, and turned away.

There are some natures to whom the grandeur and simplicity of the beautiful Catholic system appeals strongly. Such seek the arms of the Church as of their natural mother; undaunted by her mysteries, meeting her large demands on faith with an equally large supply of credulity, and surrendering their wills with a sense of relief. Such people are born Catholics: Elfrida was one of them. The faith of a child is the nearest to the Kingdom of Heaven, and in matters spiritual, it is folly indeed to think ourselves wise. Elfrida longed for the Church as an outcast longs for its home, and before the reproving eyes of this child of the streets, Methuen's fell abashed. He resented it. Was the self-righteous attitude of Philmore to be repeated in this waif and stray whom he had helped? He would test her. 'Why, Elfrida,' he said, 'you would just suit Philmore. You remind me of him.' The child recoiled. 'I don't like him,' she said.

'Catholics don't talk of what they like,' said Methuen quietly.

The child's eyes filled with tears.

'Come here, little Elfrida. Let's have this matter out. Don't run away with an *idea*, and imagine you're in love with it, as I did. Little girl, the Catholic faith is a stern reality. It means finding

our happiness in being good, if we can, and goodness is dull for people like you and me. It means giving up something we like very much. I couldn't do it, Elfrida, so the Catholic Church and I parted company. Life isn't child's play, you know, and it has to be faced honestly. You haven't lived yet, child, or rather, you have lived all on the shady side. Don't you want anything the world can give you? Pretty clothes? You were made to look pretty! Or love? You're a poor, pale, little girl now; you'd be rosy and beautiful if you were loved. Life is well worth living, Elfrida, for such as you. Don't you want to have a good time?' He could feel her trembling, but the old childish spirit was undaunted. 'I could do the hard things,' she whispered, 'if it was to please some one.'

He rose, and put her from him with a sudden gesture, and covered his face with his hands. He had failed, and he deserved to fail. The child's utter ignorance had shamed his knowledge.

'To please some one!' There spoke the highest capability of human nature, wrested, alas, by man to the lowest uses! To please some one we rise to the sublimest heights of self-sacrifice; to please some one we sink to the lowest depths of degradation!

^{&#}x27;Are you angry with me?' said Elfrida.

^{&#}x27;Not angry, little girl. Only you must choose

another teacher. You are like Philmore—too good for me. You must go away as they all do, and leave me in my wickedness and loneliness.'

Philmore would hardly have recognised this version of the story, but Methuen really thought that he was speaking the truth. He did feel himself lonely and ill-used, and he made a last desperate effort to secure this captive to his train. It was a cruel method; wresting her words to her own undoing by appealing to her pity. The childish heart was full of love, and he was her hero! 'You must choose between me and the Catholic Church, Elfrida.'

He heard a little sound close beside him, and he felt her breath upon his neck—an irregular, sobbing breath, like a child's. . . .

He raised his head, and her dark hair almost blinded him. 'I have chosen you,' she said.

What could he do but take her?

CHAPTER XIV

'NOT AS BEASTS THAT PERISH'

'THE picture is finished, Elfrida,' said Methuen.

He laid down his brushes and sighed. Yes, it was finished, and well finished. It had taken him weeks. but they had been weeks well spent. It was the best thing he had ever done, and yet he sighed. . . . He glanced from the child in the picture to the girl beside him. What a long time ago it seemed since he had begun to paint her! What a long time it seemed, even, since yesterday. We feel so differently sometimes the day after some great emotion, when we have slept upon it. Not that Methuen had slept upon it; he had been awake all night. He looked haggard and distraught; he was nervous too-a wonderful thing for him-and it made him chide the child's gaiety quite sharply. Her mood had changed. Happy in the present, she seemed to have forgotten the 'Catholic Church,' and her scruples of the day before. She came up gaily behind Methuen and peeped at the picture through his arm, slipping her hand into his. . . .

Finished! Words never spoken truly on earth but

once. From us they mean, and always must mean, imperfection. Finished, the imperfect work, all marred with sin, and stained with tears! Finished, the pleasant intercourse, when we thought it had just begun! Finished, the short life, with its hopes and promises unfulfilled! Finished, perhaps, the dangerous dallying with some 'pleasant sin.' The words are said now with regret, now with relief, but in their perfected sense, never, by human lips!

They stood looking at the picture together. 'Well,' said Elfrida at last, 'aren't you satisfied with it, that you keep saying, "It is finished," so sadly? Do you know,' she added saucily, 'I'm almost sorry I chose you, instead of the Catholic Church—you 're so cross!'

'Then change your mind, my child,' said Methuen gravely; 'I give you leave.'

She started: then looked up at him slowly; all the life and happiness dying from her face as she looked.

He groaned: he could not meet her eyes. All the man in him was in revolt.

With trembling hands, he put out of sight his brushes and all the implements of his recent work. Then he lifted the picture from the easel, and put that too out of sight; the child watching him all the time.

Yes, the picture was finished, and the model, as a model, was done with. There was no reason now why she should stay, except one, and against that all the divine in him rebelled.

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True, they had tacitly agreed upon it last night, but afterwards, as he tossed about sleepless, he had seen things differently. 'I can do the hard things, if it's to please some one.' The child's words had haunted him. Perhaps, though, in the morning, she would be sorry and regret her bargain. That would be an easy way out of it. However, when the morning came, by the strange perversity of human nature, Methuen was the only one to be sorry! Then there was another side to it. If he sent her away from him, would she not come to worse harm? She had nowhere to go, and she might do almost anything in her state of recoil and excitement. Surely she would be safer with him.

Why, when we are trying with all our might to do the right thing, if only we can discover what it is, are right and wrong so inextricably mixed?

The devil is a cute person, and he fights us with our own weapons. He does not only make vice attractive, but by carefully studying our point of view, he makes it appear virtue!

As Methuen walked wearily to and fro, tidying up, he wished that Elfrida would go. He had put away all traces of the past weeks, except the child. Why did she linger, tempting him? If only he had not kissed her and stroked her hair!

Let no one minimise the strength of such a temptation to such a nature as Methuen's. . . .

He would miss her very much, certainly. He had

lived in his occupation lately. People had come and gone, but he had not seen them; he had been too much engrossed with his picture.

No doubt there had been plenty of jokes about him going the round of his set, but he had not troubled. He would hear enough of it now, when the child was gone. . . .

Still she did not stir, but crouched in a heap, where he had left her by the picture. Then suddenly he saw her spring up, rush to the nail where her hat was hanging, and make one bound to the door.

'Elfrida,' he said, but she did not pause or turn, till he said it again, in a tone of such stern command that she had to obey. She had never disobeyed that voice yet, but she came very slowly and unwillingly, and stood before him-a poor, pathetic little figure, with her swollen, tear-stained face, and her battered hat, that she had trimmed that morning with a few cheap flowers for Methuen's benefit, rammed on all askew. Just a little waif who had drifted to his feet from the sea of humanity, and that he was throwing back whence it came. That poor little hat went to Methuen's heart! He had progressed since the days when he rejoiced at Father Philmore's discomfiture, and he did not remind the child that she had wanted to do the hard things. The poor little child who could not even stop her own tears! But then there was no self-righteousness in her atti-

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tude; she had surrendered utterly to her knowledge of herself, and her love for him.

She did not wonder that when he had finished her picture, he had sent her about her business. He was a fine gentleman, and had only been playing with her, she supposed, as all fine gentlemen will. And yet she had not quite expected it of him. What she had expected, she did not know. She only knew that to be near him, in any capacity, was enough for her!

Methuen sat down heavily.

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'My child,' he said, 'can't you stop crying?'

Each sob reproached him. From her point of view he must seem so cruel! He had vanquished her better nature by rousing her passions. The chimera of virtue had melted very quickly before the reality of desire; and now, having experimented successfully, he was satisfied. It looked like that, certainly. The child glanced round her with the instinct of a wild animal for escape. Her sobs tore her to pieces, and they hurt Methuen nearly as much. She made for the door, but something in his face restrained her, and she came back and knelt down beside him.

With a great effort of will he put aside the clinging arms. 'Elfrida, we don't hurt what we love.' The child gave a little petulant cry.

'But you do hurt me,' she cried passionately, 'when you send me away. Not when you love me. That doesn't hurt.'

She felt a certain scorn for Methuen's idea of love. Yesterday he had kissed her and stroked her hair. To-day he said he loved her, and he would not touch her!

Her ideas of love were elementary, and she preferred yesterday! She had no idea of the love that loves best at a distance! Edging herself nearer, she whispered tentatively, 'I can't be good without you.' This was a new version, and Methuen smiled to himself. He knew so well that she couldn't be good with him, and so did she.

'Don't send me away,' pleaded the sobbing voice.
'I won't be much trouble if I may only see you sometimes.'

What could he say? After all, he had nothing much to live for. He had drifted away from society. He owed it nothing. Surely this child had some claim on him because she loved him. Why throw away present happiness for an idea of virtue? Would virtue console him when the child was gone? Could it be virtuous to break her heart, and after all, what was virtue? His had all disappeared with the touch of her head on his shoulder—she was such a child; such a little, soft, clinging thing! . . .

Great drops stood on Methuen's brow, and every nerve quivered. By sheer force he took her hands from his neck, and held them firmly in his own. 'Elfrida, listen to me. You said you could do the hard things if it was to please some one.'

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'Yes, but I don't mind about all that now,' said Elfrida hastily; 'I only want you.'

'Hush! don't say that. Listen to me. I don't profess to be a Catholic, Elfrida, but, for the love of you, I've learnt your lesson. There, I can't preach to you, child! only, won't you help me to do the hard things, Elfrida?' Her look cleared. 'What do you want me to do?' she said.

'I want you to go to a place where you will be made a good Catholic—where you will be happy by-and-by, doing your duty.' The last words came out falteringly. He had said only a day or two ago that goodness was 'dull.'

'Shall I see you sometimes?' said Elfrida doubtfully.

'Perhaps, when you are quite grown up, I may come to see how well you have done your duty. You'll be able to teach me then, Elfrida.'

She shook her head, and a sudden thought occurred to her. 'Mother won't let me go,' she said, in a tone of relief.

Methuen had considered this difficulty. 'You don't love your mother, Elfrida?'

'No.'

'And you'll be pleasing me. Will you come?'

For answer she stood up wearily, and began ramming the despised hat on her head again. The dumb acquiescence in her fate, and in his right to decide it, touched Methuen.

He stooped and kissed her forehead, gravely and reverently. 'God bless my little girl,' he said.

The child shuddered as they went out into the The toils were closing round her. night-air. wild bird does not love to be caged, and she felt choked already. Methuen, divining her thoughts, held her hand tightly, and the child guessed his reason, and smiled to herself, a sad little smile in the darkness. He might have trusted her; she had no thought of escape. She did not even wonder where he could be taking her at that hour of night. She only walked at his side in that mute submission and absolute faith that was part of herself. lucky for her that Methuen had weighed the matter more carefully. He was taking her to his former landlady, where she would be safe for the night at any rate, while he thought out this difficulty about her mother.

They walked along silently in the darkness, until, in a small street leading out of Oxford Circus, they were stopped by a crowd, which effectually blocked the way. Elfrida, with the instinct of a street child, forgot her troubles in the excitement of the moment, and Methuen's grasp tightened on her hand.

'What's happened?' asked he of a boy near him.

'It's a woman run over by a 'bus: she was dead drunk,' he explained, as if to run over a drunken

woman was an act of virtue. 'And now she's as dead as a door nail.'

'Come away,' said Methuen to Elfrida. He saw Claude Lorrimer in the crowd, and did not want to be recognised; but she took no notice, except to press forward more closely into the very midst of the throng.

'I think,' she said quietly, 'it's my mother.' After that Methuen said no more, only followed her as she deftly threaded her way through the congested traffic; the newspaper boys and crossing-sweepers and idlers, glad of an excitement, who always form the outskirts of a London crowd.

Nearer and nearer till she came to the very centre where they were carelessly hoisting a woman on to a hastily improvised stretcher. A woman with bedraggled skirts and dishevelled hair, and a drink-soddened face turned to the evening sky. A pitiable figure, deserving no reverence except what was due to death.

The child stood looking on quietly for a moment, then she turned away. She had not taken her hand from Methuen's all the time, neither had she spoken a word. Now she looked up. 'You can take me, she said, 'to that Catholic Home, where you have to do your duty till you're grown up, only——' and the clear tones broke, as she cast a backward glance at the dead figure on the stretcher—'I'm sorry I only thought of her when I wanted something out of her!'

It was a strange speech—a characteristic speech. Methuen could not help thinking of it as he walked wearily home, after depositing Elfrida with his landlady.

He thought of it in the night when the 'sleep of the just,' which he certainly deserved, did not visit his eyelids. Even the sleep of the unjust would have been better than nothing. And he thought of it again in the morning when he rose to a world that seemed flat, stale, and unprofitable without his 'little maid.' He would have been ashamed to own how, over his solitary breakfast, he longed for the child. But it would have comforted Elfrida, pining in her London lodging for the time when she should be 'grown up,' unspeakably.

It was certainly strange that her mother should have died on the very night when, for the first time, the child's thoughts had turned to her as a possible refuge, and it really seemed to make Elfrida's future destination pretty clear. The child thought so herself. 'You can take me,' she had said to Methuen, and acting on her words a second time, he took her to the 'Home for Destitute Girls,' conducted, on strictly Catholic lines, by Sister Monica.

CHAPTER XV

'SHADES OF THE PRISON HOUSE'

'PLEASE, Sister, Elfrida has run away again.'

The Sister Superior looked up from her writing with something between a smile and a frown, for the prim little maiden who delivered the message was overflowing with satisfaction in her own virtue and the naughtiness of the absent Elfrida, and the Sister was not slow to detect it.

'Are you quite sure, Rosie? Have you looked everywhere?'

'Everywhere, Sister,' said Rosie exultantly. 'In all the places where she was last time.'

Sister Monica rose, and put away her writing. 'That will do,' she said. 'Go back to your cooking. I will find Elfrida.'

The little maiden in her neat uniform went off obediently, if reluctantly, and the Sister sighed.

One of the common complaints brought against Homes of this sort is, that they turn the children out all on the same pattern; but there was no danger of this in Elfrida's case. She was different from all the others.

It was splendid material to work upon, as the Sister had told Methuen, but requiring an amount of labour that any one used as she was to the ordinary type of girl, found somewhat fatiguing.

The room where Sister Monica was sitting was a bare little place, except for its sacred pictures—a 'Madonna del Sista,' a 'Vierge aux Rochers,' and several 'Holy Families.'

It was her own special sanctum, where she saw visitors, interviewed culprits, and conducted the general and multifarious business of the Home.

Its furniture began and ended with a plain pinewood table in the middle of the room, and four chairs to match, set stiffly against the wall, except that in one corner stood a large, comfortable leather easy-chair with huge arms, and its face to the wall, looking as if it had been put there for punishment.

The girls often wondered whether in her 'hours of ease' Sister Monica pulled this chair out and lolled comfortably in it, instead of sitting rigidly upright, as they generally saw her.

Perhaps Elfrida could have enlightened them. She knew, too, what lay behind the mysteries of the closely-drawn velvet curtains in the corner of the room—a beautiful life-size crucifix, before which she had often knelt and prayed in penitence for some childish fault.

The Sister Superior was not at all an austerelooking person. She was plump and comfortable, with a shrewd, kindly face, and twinkling grey eyes that saw through most people. Elfrida always felt as if they were reading her soul.

Next to Sister Monica's room was the dispensary, which had its own Sister in charge, and on a certain day the girls were had in to help her in the weighing, and mixing, and labelling, and doing up in bottles or packets, as the case might be, of the various drugs destined for their consumption when occasion required.

Dispensary-day was, next to chapel-day, Elfrida's joy. She loved dabbling with physics, and had visions of making up her own medicines one day, and going about with a large, important bunch of keys jangling at her waist like Sister Dorothea.

Above the ground-floor were the nurseries, where the 'Baby Sister' presided, and feasted her babyloving soul on babies 'young' and 'old,' 'tender' and 'tough,' but she never seemed to have 'had enough' of them; the instinct of maternity is wonderfully strong in some unmarried women.

The girls had a nursery-day too, and Elfrida liked it, next to 'chapel' and 'dispensary' days. For house-work and cooking she had no particular affection, and any form of 'lessons' her soul abhorred.

Saturday was 'chapel-day,' and then the girls whose marks were best during the week were allowed to help in bringing fresh water for the altar vases, cutting stalks, sorting out dead flowers, and gener-

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ally helping in cleaning up the chapel ready for Sunday.

This was Elfrida's greatest joy. The Home chapel was not equal in beauty or dignity to the 'ladies' chapel' in that 'Catholic Church' of ever-green memory, where she first made acquaintance with Methuen, but in its way it was a little gem. It was newly decorated, with a 'Salviati' reredos, mosaic chancel pavement, and frescoed walls; and its small size, which prevented outsiders from attending it, gave it an added homeliness in the eyes of its own family party.

Elfrida, although decidedly a lazy girl, had never yet lost a mark through missing matins, at seven in the winter, and six in the summer. If the Sister in charge wanted to punish her, she kept her from evensong; if she wanted to punish the other girls, she deprived them of a meal or a play-hour.

The chaplain, a kind but somewhat austere elderly man, took an interest in Elfrida, which he did not let her guess. The girl imagined that he disliked her

It was hardly likely that any one so in favour with the authorities would be equally popular with her schoolmates, and Elfrida was pretty well hated. Therefore Sister Monica salved her conscience for any shade of preference which she might show, by saying that the child must have companionship of some kind.

The other girls, who were mostly London children, discovered the story of Elfrida's parentage, and twitted her with it; also with being an artist's model.

It was a dangerous and fascinating pastime to tease Elfrida—to see those great eyes blaze with scorn and rage, and the small brown hands clench themselves on whatever came nearest, which was not always themselves.

Yes, it was great fun up to a certain point, but beyond that her tormentors became frightened. Elfrida was so dreadfully in earnest about everything. She had been known to fight girls twice her size when first she came, generally for some taunt about Methuen, but of late the Sister had hoped that she was taming down a little, and she felt disappointed at this new outbreak.

As she passed the window on her way to prosecute the search, she saw a familiar figure in an unfamiliar dress with a red cap perched jauntily on the dark head, march unconcernedly up the garden path, leaving the gate open behind her, and walking with that characteristically free swinging stride which the school had learned to associate with the unorthodox Elfrida.

Sister Monica beckoned peremptorily to the culprit first to shut the gate, and then to come in and be duly reprimanded, and she pursed up her lips severely in preparation. It was hard, however, to

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be angry with Elfrida; she usually gave such a good reason for her conduct.

She stood before the Sister now with her cheeks glowing as brightly as her red cap after her walk.

The cap was illegitimate, and the walk was illegitimate, and Elfrida knew it, and so did Sister Monica, who proceeded to explain that this sort of thing could not go on. 'You really must not walk the streets in that dress,' she said.

'Well, I didn't like to wear your uniform,' said the culprit calmly. 'You might have had me up for stealing.'

Elfrida's manners always suffered during these escapades. She never came back so respectful as she went. Something of the old street instinct seemed to return with her.

'Where did you go?' said the Sister guardedly.

'Oh, only for a turn this time. I couldn't bear it if I didn't get away sometimes, you know—Sister.'

The last word came out with an effort under her returning sense of duty.

She had taken her red cap off, and was swinging it round and round by the tassel as she spoke.

The Sister looked at the curbed expression of the glowing face and sighed. Wasted vitality is always sad, but was the sigh for her own or Elfrida's?

For the child's enforced restraint within the prison walls of hard and fast rules; of conventional usages; of dawning maturity; or for her own vanished youth?

Her own limitations of middle life, with its cooler blood and calmer brain; its greater prudence and circumspection?

Whichever it was, the Sister sighed as she glanced at the brilliant young creature standing impatiently before her in all the unconscious pride of youth and strength, untired by her long tramp, and only eager to be off again.

- 'Are you so unhappy here then, child?' she said.
- 'I'm never unhappy with you,' said Elfrida truthfully. 'But I don't get on with the girls.'
- 'Well, I have told you that you can go out with me,' said the Sister resignedly. She felt that she was making a not inconsiderable sacrifice, as indeed she was, and Elfrida felt duly grateful; but there were times when even the Sister's company did not commend itself to her. The overwhelmingness of the honour made it somewhat oppressive.
 - 'I was not fit to go out with you to-day,' she said.
 - 'Well, perhaps not in that dress.'
 - 'My inside dress wasn't fit,' said Elfrida quaintly.
- 'The old story, child! They had been teasing you on the usual subject, I suppose, and you got into a passion.'

Elfrida nodded, with a very red face, while the Sister meditated, and knit her brows in some perplexity.

It was a most extraordinary position for the child. Methuen had brought her there, and it was hardly

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in girl-nature not to comment on the fact, or to question the new-comer on her relations with him.

Most girls, in a similar position, would rather have enjoyed the sensation which his appearance created; but Elfrida not only refused to gratify their curiosity, but resented it so firmly that she gave herself away with regard to future treatment.

Battles-royal were always being waged, and the Sister did not see any way of stopping it. She was in Methuen's confidence. He had confided to her his wishes with regard to the girl's future, and all that he had discovered of her parentage, which was more than Elfrida knew herself.

'Work on her Catholic bias,' he had said to the Sister. 'It is the strongest thing about her, stronger even than her love for me.'

The Sister was not sure of this; but it was certainly very strong, matched only by her utterignorance and lack of self-restraint.

It was a strong character altogether, for good or evil, as Methuen had said. The Sister had advised him not to write to her at present. 'Leave her to me and the chaplain,' she said, 'for a year or two, and wait in hope. She is worth training.'

Yes, Elfrida was worth training, but she took such an amount that the Sister found the process somewhat wearing.

'I won't punish you now, Elfrida,' she said gently.
'Listen to me. We are all in prison more or less

as we grow up. Our bodies restrain us for one thing.'

Elfrida could not grasp this at all, and she glanced doubtfully at her long arms and legs. Her body did not restrain *her*. It is when the infirmities of age creep upon us that we realise our 'prison-house of clay.'

'There are so many things to be kept under,' continued the Sister. 'Our tempers and desires; in fact, ourselves. It is hard for such vehement young creatures as you; but we must grow up, Elfrida, though I wonder sometimes if you ever will. You are past sixteen now.'

Elfrida was listening intently. She was interested, but alarmed. For every reason she must grow up!

'This is your probation time,' continued the Sister.
'You are being prepared for——' Elfrida pricked up her ears, so to speak, and listened intently for the end of the speech; but the Sister, noticing her self-conscious look, changed the original intention of her sentence adroitly, without altering the words, doubting anew, as she did so, whether Elfrida's 'Catholic bias' was the strongest in her character.

'You are being prepared for confirmation,' she said, and Elfrida assented, as in duty bound; but her eyes twinkled. She felt, somehow, that the Sister had tricked her; her speech had fallen short of her original intention. It had begun by being interesting, and ended lamely.

In fact, Sister Monica had blundered inadvertently on to what she considered dangerous ground, but what was she to do? Methuen had particularly desired her to keep his name before the girl as an incentive, and yet, knowing all she did of men, having seen so many lives shipwrecked and so many hopes blasted, she wondered sometimes whether this thing could ever be. If not, God help the child, for no one else could.

'Elfrida,' she said, 'we shall never make you a good Catholic if you cannot endure hardness. There is no merit, child, in doing the easy things. We have to "welcome each rebuff that turns earth's smoothness rough." After all, the rebuffs only last a little while, and then——'

The Sister's eyes shone, and so did Elfrida's, though they were thinking of different things.

She had touched the right chord at last. The girl was on familiar ground here. She remembered her own words, 'I can do the hard things if it is to please some one,' and it was, thought Elfrida triumphantly. Surely if ever any one had an incentive to be a 'good Catholic,' to 'do their duty till they were grown up,' she had.

A little while, as the Sister had said, of the hard things represented by nasty girls, and a prison uniform, and then—the fairy prince!

'I'll try,' said Elfrida, hugging Sister Monica in her enthusiasm.

'That's a good girl, and, to begin with, leave off hugging me! You—you really mustn't, Elfrida,' in a breathless tone. 'It's against the rules. Run away now. I shall see you later on in chapel.' Once in Elfrida's embrace, the Sister was powerless. She could only remonstrate. The girl was like a young bear.

She removed her arms reluctantly at the Sister's words. 'I can't help it,' she said, then spoilt her compliment as she left the room, by remarking with more truth than politeness, 'I must hug some one, and there isn't any one else.'

PART II

Sec. 24

CHAPTER I

'A HOUSE DIVIDED'

'THE Church Times be hanged.'

- 'But, father---'
- 'Hold your tongue, Doris. Your opinion isn't worth having. A pack of silly women will believe anything.'
- 'But, father, look at the men we get at S. Sebastien's. Why, yesterday at the "Stations"——'
- 'At the fiddlesticks. There, hold your tongue, child—your mother's crying!'

There was nothing very remarkable in this, as poor Mrs. Leary often resorted to tears during these discussions, knowing that they sometimes separated the combatants when all else failed.

The assembled trio were each in their way very fair representatives of their class. Mr. Leary was a man with a craze which he chose to call a principle, and like all men with crazes, he had ridden his craze till it rode him.

He said 'Down with ritual,' on all occasions, appropriate and otherwise; like one of those dolls that says 'Papa' when you press it in a particular place.

He resembled the doll also in the fact that when you pressed him, he could get no further than his parrot-cry! He was pat with *terms*, but lamentably vague as to *meanings*. He could say his lesson by heart, but if you interrupted him in the middle, he was done for.

His daughter, Doris, often tried this dodge, with the inevitable result that her father lost his thread and his temper at the same time.

Indeed, Mr. Leary's family felt quite wicked on the ritual question. The people we live with do get very sick of our crazes, they hear so much of them. And Mr. Leary, in spite of his vagueness as to terms, was lamentably in earnest!

He might confuse 'thurifers' and 'censers,' but you could trust him to 'spot' a 'ritualist,' except sometimes in the night, when he took the bedpost for one, and treated it accordingly, awaking after the unequal contest more irate than ever. He had been heard to say that if a ritualist was buried near him, he should turn in his grave, and the man to whom he said it, had remarked that it was to be hoped, for the sake of the ritualist, that Mr. Leary would turn out of it, and get into another a little farther off!

A pet theory of Mr. Leary's was that if there were no women there would be no ritualism.

'Women,' he said, 'were at the bottom of most nonsense!'

It was 'women who filled the churches for want of something better to do, women who worked the Guy Fawkes arrangements they called "vestments"; women who messed about with water, and dead stalks, and scissors, and called it "doing the altar vases"; women who aired their hysterics to some young fool of a curate; women, in fact, who kept the whole show going.'

For confessionals Mr. Leary had an eagle, if jaundiced, eye. He would put on his glasses, and peer into every hole and corner of a church for them; and being very short-sighted, and somewhat rabid on the point, and also having very little idea what they ought to look like, he often imagined them where they were not. Once he had taken a disused pulpit for one of his pet abominations, and on several occasions had cast suspicious glances at the fald-stool.

Doris, of course, was strictly enjoined to remember female modesty, and to keep her sins to herself; but Mr. Leary often wondered how she acted upon the latter injunction. Things are generally capable of two interpretations.

There seemed, however, no two ways of looking at Mr. Leary as people's warden at S. Sebastien's. Viewed in any light, he appeared about the most unsuitable person for the post that could have been found. The fact was that at first he had not shown his true 'colours': but as S. Sebastien's had developed

in one direction, so had its warden in another; till they had grown entirely out of focus with one another. Whether he remained there, as he said, to 'snatch a few brands from the burning,' or whether he was simply biding his time and laying his plans, was known best to himself and his following. He had a following among the congregation, as all rebels and grumblers have. Just as a man need only stand still long enough and stare at the sky to collect a small crowd, so he has only to start a grievance, and he is sure to be surrounded by pretended sympathisers, who, under cover of joining with him, are in reality paying off old scores of their own.

Probably Mr. Leary had his own reasons for remaining at S. Sebastien's, and also for allowing his daughter to be so closely connected with the church. As a rule, it is the daughters who allow their parents privileges nowadays, but there was nothing of the 'new woman' about Doris Leary. She was just home from school, and she emphatically 'smelt of bread and butter.' She gave you the impression of having only just put her hair up, and let her frocks down, and become a full-fledged There had never been any gawky young lady. stage about Doris. She had managed somehow to retain her childish roundness and prettiness throughout, but she was intensely young, even now, at what she considered the advanced age of eighteen. Her enthusiasms were those of extreme youth. She

had just taken a class in the Sunday-school, and no flood of rain or drift of snow had yet been found of sufficient severity to keep her at home, even combined with the prospect of arriving at Sunday-school with a 'fringe' out of curl. Not that an uncurled 'fringe,' or indeed the absence of any hair at all, would have attracted the notice of Father Philmore, who ignored trifles: among which he apparently included his Sunday-school teachers. But Doris had enthusiasm of a 'new broom,' which even the indifference of a Father Philmore is powerless to daunt, and she went on her way rejoicing. The 'young idea' shot rapidly in her class, as did also sweets and confetti and bits of screwed-up paper, and the 'things innumerable' with which a boy's pocket is filled.

Her class took a wonderful interest in the Catholic faith as presented to them by Doris; but they took an even greater interest in the material of her dress, and the length and softness of her boa!

Discussions waxed hot in the class over the metal of which her watch and the knob of her umbrella was composed.

Then Doris' district was another joy to her. She lived in that district! She would sally forth in the morning with the air of a public benefactor; a warm glow of generosity at her heart, and the tickets given to her by the vicar in her hand. In the afternoon, having forgotten something, round she would go again, and, after summoning the long-suffering

women, who were probably afflicted with 'bad legs,'—people in districts usually are,—up a steep flight of stairs, for the purpose of issuing advice on subjects of which she was profoundly ignorant, Doris would return home, wondering how her district could have existed before she took it!

On the whole, district visitors, and particularly young district visitors, are treated with great toleration, when they try to teach their grandmothers 'to suck eggs!'

The feeding of Doris' district weighed on her mind at first. Mrs. Leary missed puddings from the larder on various occasions, and families who sat down daily to as good a dinner as Doris herself, were fed by her with more zeal than discretion, much to their private amusement.

One 'lady' in her district, who actually boasted a drawing-room, closed the doors of her house to Doris for ever, because she presented her with a packet of tea!

Still, they say that he who never made a mistake never made anything worth making, and as one must try one's 'prentice hand on something, church-work does as well as anything else; so Doris continued to play at it very prettily as one plays at most things at eighteen.

It was lucky for her and her father that Mrs. Leary was a person of moderate mind, for, between her husband and daughter, she had her work cut out. How to feed them both was a problem in itself, for Doris would eat nothing but fish on Fridays, while Mr. Leary used words unfit to relate when he saw it appear on the table!

Mrs. Leary's own attitude, though she never obtruded it on any one, was that of a Moderate Churchwoman.

She liked church very much on Sundays, when she expected a 'nice, cheerful' service at eleven o'clock, with plenty of music, and plenty of sermon, but no innovations.

Why she pinned her faith on that particular service, she could not have explained, except that she was accustomed to it, and we all know that what we are accustomed to is the gospel of English minds.

Mrs. Leary hated extremes, as much as such a thoroughly amiable woman could hate anything, and from this point of view she disliked equally Doris' Catholicism, which took her to the 'early service,' from which she returned with such an air of conscious virtue, having left her mother to 'make the breakfast,' and Mr. Leary's 'Protestantism,' which made him use such very strong language, that she wondered sometimes whether religion was not a mistake if you wanted to live peaceably!

In fact, Mrs. Leary had her own opinion about a faith that, to quote her husband, 'set people by the ears,' only she had the wisdom not to bring her own opinions forward. She had learned by long

experience the futility of discussion, particularly of discussion with Mr. Leary, whose one mode of procedure was to hurl texts at her. Mrs. Leary had not much opinion of texts as a means of argument. In fact, from constant association with Mr. Leary, she had almost grown to dislike them. It seemed to her that anybody could prove anything by a text, which argument, followed to its logical conclusion, seemed to tell rather against texts. So Mrs. Leary never did follow to its logical conclusion, but decided that she was wrong, because texts must be right!

She wished she liked them better, and she wished she could think of some on her side, on 'peace,' for instance; but when Mr. Leary opened the campaign with a flood of eloquence and 'What have I to do with peace?' 'Not peace, but a sword,' and so on, she could think of nothing but texts on his side, which, of course, necessitated her keeping silence.— The very best thing she could have done, if she had but known it!

It had never occurred to Mrs. Leary that her bad memory was a blessing in disguise, only, like most of her mercies, so effectually disguised that she did not recognise it as such, which was a pity, because she was always racking her brains during grace to think of more mercies.

This grace generally lasted about five minutes, during which Doris, who said a much more expeditious grace herself, cast hungry glances at the table.

Doris didn't like long graces. If there was a nice dinner, they kept you from it; and if there was a nasty one, she didn't see why you should be thankful.

Mr. Leary always started with 'For these and all Thy mercies,' and then went off on a line of his own. His wife never followed him beyond 'mercies.' She stopped short there and tried to think of her own. She wished there were more, only Doris and Mr. Leary, and they were doubtful blessings, both of them. She came to an end so soon, that she had to listen to Mr. Leary, who did not come to an end soon enough! In fact, during grace she was doubtful whether he ought to be regarded as a blessing at all!

CHAPTER II

'THE NAKEDNESS OF THE LAND'

IT is a peculiar fact that to see the internal workings of a thing is usually to despise it more or less! That 'familiarity breeds contempt' is true: from the cook who, after compounding the Christmas pudding, disdains to taste it, to the young lady-workers at S. Sebastien's, who, after toiling all day to give the altars a festive appearance, were not in such a position to appreciate the general effect as the congregation who streamed in from the outside!

The workers were sadly conscious that the mass of white flowers was filled in here and there by wadding, because flowers were scarce and funds were low, and that they reposed in gallipots, more or less deftly covered with ivy, but liable at any time to reappear in their pristine beauty. They were also painfully aware of bits of string left by clumsy fingers among the adornments of pulpit and screen, and they knew, alas! that they themselves were not good young ladies doing church - work, but emphatically children of wrath, filled with envy, malice, and all uncharitableness, because Miss So-and-so had been chosen to do

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the high-altar, and Miss Somebody else had received more notice from the powers that be, than they had!

They knew, too, that even the vicar had been considerably ruffled in his mind, to say the least of it, when rehearsing the procession, because one little boy would hurry, and another dawdle, and they all giggled at the vestments and at the thurifer, because his unaccustomed hands hurled the incense so viciously, while the cross-bearer staggered round the church holding the cross out, with a frightened and beseeching expression that seemed to say 'Take it,' to every one he met; while his gasp of relief as he deposited it again in its corner with more haste than dignity was audible all over the church. Yes, a procession looks very dignified when it 'goes forth in peace,' but there has probably been a good deal that is not 'peace' in the preliminary arrangements.

In fact, 'Catholic Ritual' is a plant which takes root very slowly in the 'unfruitful soil' of English minds; its establishment is a work of generations, and Father Philmore's hair was growing grey in the initiatory process!

He began to look forward longingly to a place of repose, either in this world or the next, from which he could calmly contemplate another man reaping the fields that he had sown. He had realised from the first that it would be all sowing time for him, but he wondered sometimes when he was in a despondent mood if the reaping would ever come!

His position was very isolated. There were no whole-hearted sympathisers; no one to meet him on equal or superior ground; the very best of them were learning from him, and their ignorance was appalling! He had ceased to believe in zeal. So many had started well, and left their 'first love.' Sweeping clean so long as they were 'new brooms,' and afterwards ceasing to sweep at all. He had also ceased to believe in single-heartedness. People worked from such funny motives, he had discovered. Silly motives, or deep motives, as the case might be, but unworthy ones almost always.

He was not surprised. He had weighed his own motives in the balance once and found them sadly wanting. It had made him not more charitable, but less hopeful and less exacting—there is a difference. Having outlived his enthusiasms, he expected less of himself and others. He knew that a priest has the ordinary failings of humanity, and does not therefore 'bring reproach on Christianity' every time he is ruffled by things going wrong. And he knew also remarkably well, that to be a church-worker is not to have taken out a patent for virtue! There is no charm in church-work of itself to exorcise the world. the flesh, and the devil! On the contrary, it is the latter gentleman's best opportunity, for then are we specially tempted to think ourselves secure. Father Philmore knew all this, but he could not make others see it.

There are certain people who will always refuse to 'know' the clergy 'out of the pulpit,' in case they prove 'disappointing'; who are always thrusting your religion at you, as it were, and expecting you to live up to it, as they call it! who seem to fancy that because of your 'fastings and prayers and repentance.' you set up to be better than your neighbours. These are the sort of people who 'live the life' instead of going to church; who are clever enough to 'worship God anywhere,' and seem to keep Him in their hearts by a sort of private arrangement, which unfortunately excludes the weak-minded people who go to church. In fact, they seem to think churchgoing and 'living the life' incompatible with each other. Then there is the all-agape class—the people who look upon the services as a sort of perpetual circus which can be had for nothing; who declare that 'the neighbourhood was so dull before the church came, but that now there is always something on,' and the bigger the 'show,' the better they are pleased. After all, a copper dropped into those delightfully private offertory bags is a very cheap way of being entertained! These people flounder hopelessly but delightedly about, among ecclesiastical terms, which they mouth with the most wonderful fluency and indifference as to their applicability.

'Why do you take your cassock off your head when you celebrate?' asked a lady of Father Philmore. Then seeing his puzzled expression,

while he tried to remember in what moment of mental aberration he could have worn his cassock on his head, she hastened to add: 'I mean that little black cap.'

'Oh, that's a biretta.'

'Is it?' indifferently. 'Oh, well, the name doesn't matter.'

Then there were the more serious objectors to deal with, the people who couldn't be taken as a joke.

Perhaps the most irritating of these were the quibblers—the people who could 'inwardly digest' every doctrine but one, at which they stuck hopelessly; or those whose extremely delicate internal arrangements revolted at two or even three. They always called this particular doctrine which did not commend itself to them, 'a point of conscience.' Then there were the people who stood the doctrines, but 'kicked' at the ritual, and the people who swallowed the ritual, but revolted at the doctrines.

The first class didn't mind what was said, because they could go away and forget it, but they fled incense like the plague, preferring, apparently, the fumes of brimstone, which was the only alternative offered by a certain reverend gentleman!

The second class liked a musical service and everything 'artistic,' but always contended that it 'didn't mean anything,' which signified in plain English, that ritual happened to please them, while doctrines

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involved the doing of things they didn't like, which meant the things they ought.'

Wholesale objectors who cried like Mr. Leary, 'Down with every blessed thing,' were easier to deal with. You know where you are with this class; they simply like nothing; but what the vicar had at present failed to find was the man who liked everything!

CHAPTER III

'THESE CHRISTIANS'

'I WANT to speak to you,' said Doris to Father Philmore, after evensong on Maundy-Thursday.

The vicar sighed. He was tired; things had not been going smoothly all day. He had noticed various disapproving faces at the 'Sung Mass' that morning, the owners whereof had left the church in evident horror, during the Prayer of Consecration;—a particularly favourite time, by the way, for those who desire to express disapproval. Father Philmore could not help wishing that they would choose a 'more convenient season.'—He had been picturing the proceedings in the local paper with everything spelt wrong, and he returned to the contemplation of Doris, standing importantly before him with some impatience.

'I wanted to tell you,' she said in a mysterious whisper, with her eyes fixed modestly on the ground, 'that my father intends writing to the Bishop.'

She raised her eyes, as she discharged this bombshell, and looked him full in the face to see how he would take it. She had been picturing a sermon in which she was unmistakably alluded to as the preserver of S. Sebastien's, in fact the bulwark of the Catholic faith in those parts, to be followed by a meeting at which she would receive a testimonial a gold bangle, perhaps, with an inscription worded by the vicar, 'in grateful memory of faithful service.'

She looked down coyly as she met his eye.

'Intends writing to the Bishop, does he? What about?' he said, speaking aloud, as if in contrast to her whisper.

Where was the expected ring of gratitude in his voice? And it was not particularly polite, Doris thought, to repeat her words.

He was either fearfully dense, or painfully flippant, and she began to feel injured.

'About the goings-on here,' she said, falling into her father's phraseology for want of a better.

'Oh, is that all!' said Father Philmore.

He looked her up and down as he spoke. She was such a childish little thing, and so absurdly important, and he always distrusted overmuch zeal at first. He had thought Doris 'a nice child' before, when he thought of her at all, but he liked her none the better for her speech. He even fancied he could detect a lurking resemblance to her father, as she stood before him in the conscious pride of having done a rather fine thing. Father Philmore thought himself a good judge of character, but unconsciously to himself he was not a fair one, owing to the warped tone

of his own mind. Critical people often imagine that because they see people's faults they know all about them, but in this they are mistaken, because people are not all faults. It did not require a very keen judge of character to read poor little Doris. She was such an embryo creature, with tears and smiles ready to be turned on at the shortest notice according to circumstances. Just now the tears were uppermost, but offended pride restrained them. The vicar was watching her, and actually smiling. Meeting her eye, he stifled a yawn, and held out his hand. 'Goodbye,' he said; 'I don't think we need alarm ourselves, as it's only about S. Sebastien's. I was so afraid he might have written to complain about you.'

He meant it for a joke: she was a nice child after all, and he had been rather short with her. He would dismiss her kindly, but he little knew the self-importance of all newly-fledged young ladies, and of this one in particular, her father's own daughter in this respect. He might have lectured her with impunity. She would have listened meekly and enjoyed it, but to treat her as a joke was fatal. Doris managed to dodge his hand somehow, and to hold her head high till she was safely outside the church. Then she let her tears have their way. 'I'll teach him to laugh at me,' she sobbed, 'and at father too. His own churchwarden! Father mayn't have nice views, but he can be nasty, and I hope he will! And to think,' as softer feelings predominated, 'of the way I've

worked for him! Gone to school in the rain, and spoilt my clothes, and got colds, and been rowed. Yes, and fasted and meditated, and all the rest of it; and he doesn't respect me a bit!' Her sobs broke out afresh, as this dreadful fact forced itself upon her. 'If he only didn't look so good in his vestments!' she added pathetically.

Having reached home by this time, Doris promptly retired to bed, and lav wondering whether, after her father's letter, the Bishop would call in person and fetch Father Philmore to prison. She was picturing a scene in which, at great peril to herself, she let him out on his humbly apologising for all misdemeanours. At this point Mrs. Leary appeared on the scene, having heard flying footsteps pass the dining-room; she was used to these little ebullitions, and knew that young 'Catholics' are not above receiving comfort from 'Moderately High-Church' mothers, particularly when the comfort is accompanied by a nice little supper. Doris' appetite had evidently survived Father Philmore's want of respect. She cleared the plate and lay down with a sigh, that was half-satisfaction at her supper, and half-regret over Father Philmore's defection.

'I'm glad now,' she remarked, 'that I didn't tell him that last time I ought to have been meditating on charity, I meditated on *him*.'

Mrs. Leary murmured that it was just as well, and thought what strange people 'Catholics' were.

'It's very hard to meditate properly,' muttered her daughter drowsily. 'I shan't tell father to-night about the vicar,' she added.

Mrs. Leary was engaged in the operation commonly known as tucking up, but she paused abruptly.

'Surely, Doris,' she said, 'you wouldn't make mischief.'

'Oh, wouldn't I, to pay him out,' was the unhesitating reply.

'Then to pay him out for a slight to yourself, or what you look upon as such, you would betray your Church. Well, if that's all your Catholicism teaches you, it's not worth much!'

In sheer astonishment at such an outburst from her usually gentle mother, Doris raised herself on her elbow and gazed after the retreating figure, while poor Mrs. Leary descended to her husband, thinking how very nearly extremes met in the case of Doris and her father! She was almost tempted to wish sometimes that her family had no religious views; their next-door neighbours believed in nothing, with the result, apparently, of living together in unity!

Mr. Leary had now to be reckoned with.

He raised his head from the depths of the *Church-man* as she opened the door, and demanded irascibly, 'What's the matter now?'

There had been some excuse for him. He had been enjoying his own company the whole evening, while his wife listened to Doris' woes.

'Oh, nothing special,' she said deprecatingly; 'the child's rather upset, that's all.

'The child's always upset,' said Mr. Leary. 'It doesn't say much for her ritualism! "By their fruits ye shall know them."'

Mrs. Leary was silent, but she glanced at her husband. The inference was obvious. But, for the matter of that, what religion would survive if its only test was the lives of the majority of its professors!

She had no idea, at that time of night, of entering on a war of words. She was weary and jaded, and there were tears in her eyes as she walked in a dispirited way towards the door which she had so lately entered.

On reaching it she turned and faced her husband. 'Herbert,' she said, 'I sometimes think that if this is religion I would rather have none of it.'

For a second time that night Mrs. Leary had electrified her audience.

To her tears, her husband was well accustomed, therefore they made no particular impression, but her words rankled, for after himself and Protestantism, he loved his wife.

He had long ceased to regret that she did not share his views, the advantage of a 'go-between' in such a house as theirs being too apparent. The idea that his wife might have held Doris' views had never occurred to him, but the fact that she went on her quiet way, not exactly rejoicing, but holding her own, and keeping peace betwen the two extremes, was a matter of thanksgiving to Mr. Leary. In fact, all the admiration which he had to spare from himself and his views he bestowed on his wife.

But to-night something in the office of mediator had not gone as smoothly as usual. With women, Mr. Leary argued, religion is always a matter of sentiment. Let some one hurt their feelings, and their faith goes down to zero.

After all, what were the words of a woman, with only rather more brains than most women, and that was very little in Mr. Leary's opinion, to disturb the leader of the local crusade for English freedom?

Yes, he was a public character, with the welfare of many dependent upon him, and he must rise above these little domestic differences, which he supposed the best of women have.

He must divert his mind from them by an effort of will, so he made the effort of will, aided by a glass of something hot, and thought of that ever-inspiring theme, the services at S. Sebastien's.

He had been there that morning. It was Maundy-Thursday, and he had peeped in during the 'Missa Cantata.'

The prostrate people—his daughter among them—the flower-laden altars, the 'Priest elevating the Host'; he reproduced them all in thought, and his

Things had made rapid strides face darkened. lately in every direction. He could do nothing better than leave them alone. 'The fields were The time for a clear whitening to harvest.' sweep was coming. A division between the sheep and the goats. A burning of the latter with fire unquenchable. A gathering of the former into the safe garner of the 'Whosoever will' Gospel Hall, there to be fed by their chosen leader with the pure milk of the word.' So mused Mr. Leary, rehearsing his speech for the P.S.A. on the following after-It did not strike him that his metaphors were somewhat mixed, and that sheep are not usually stored in barns or dieted on milk, but we all know that born orators are independent of such trifles as metaphors, and indeed of the Queen's English altogether!

In appearance Mr. Leary was small, the only big thing about him, except in his own estimation, being his long beard. He had all the fussy pompousness of a small man; the sort of would-be dignity that is for ever asserting itself in case it should be forgotten.

His self-importance had swelled, if possible, since his appointment as people's warden, but it was completely merged now in his latest character of local reformer!

As he sailed up the church on Sundays, self-satisfaction absolutely radiated from him. It shone from his bald head and carefully polished boots, and

the lavish display of watch-chain across the large expanse of his white waistcoat. Mrs. Leary occupied her usual position between the two extremes, and Doris, equally convinced of her own importance, headed the family trio; her father liking, as he told her, to see mischief in front of him, and reserving the tit-bit, in the shape of himself, till the last.

It is a strange fact that there are some people from whom one cannot disassociate the comic element! It probably proceeds from their own deficiency in the sense of humour: they fail to perceive what is ludicrous in themselves, and therefore to remedy it.

Mr. Leary, viewed as a father, as a husband, as a churchwarden, or as a champion of Protestantism, was alike ridiculous. The mischief of it was, for S. Sebastien's, that he was not so ridiculous as he seemed. He would never make a martyr, simply because he was too self-conscious to lose sight of himself in a cause, but he was an ideal mischief-maker.

The exaggerated sense of personal importance which made self-sacrifice impossible to him, gave him the eagerness to avenge a wrong, and the keenness and cunning in carrying out his revenge, which are so seldom united. It also made him stick to his point in face of ridicule, and not know when he was beaten. He cared not how funny a figure he cut in the eyes of others, so long as, in his own, he was a kind of demigod. It was strange that this man who was waging eternal war against the Pope and all constituted

authority; whose one cry was a 'free conscience and an open Bible,' had for his possible El Dorado, when all constituted authority should be swept away, a kingdom represented by the 'Whosoever will' Gospel Hall in which his petty tyranny held full sway, and in which that same 'open Bible' should be interpreted by himself alone!

He was great on 'idolatry in the Church of England,' but he had not yet touched on idolatry out of it—that worship of self, which is a much more common failing. He hardly dared, because, when the cap fits so well, there are always plenty of hands to put it on—to somebody else. In fact, we are all so ready to perform this kind office for one another, that the putting on of our own caps becomes quite unnecessary!

Truly the conscience of some Christians is a wonderful thing!

Mr. Leary read nightly to his assembled family that 'revealed word,' which he firmly believed was to make them wise, that 'lamp of truth inspired from cover to cover,' as he was fond of calling it at local meetings, and yet the fact that 'he who hateth his brother is a murderer' seemed to make no impression on him. He continued to glare at his vicar, and to hope for heaven!

But then it is one thing to accept a truth generally, and quite another to apply it personally. We are all vaguely conscious that to love our enemies, in a

general way, is a thing to be aimed at, but when it comes to doing it to our own particular personal foe, we always make mental reservations.

Father Philmore's conscience was another variety. It insisted on a 'full Catholic Ritual' even at the cost of an empty church. He honestly thought that God preferred a worship accompanied by incense-clouds, even if the clouds dissipated the congregation.

His God was the God of *Externals*. The God of love, who only reveals Himself to loving hearts, he did not yet know, but he acted according to his lights, and the God he did know he served honestly.

We often sing about 'heathen blindness,' but Christian blindness, the blindness which talks of the Sacrament of Unity, and makes it a bone of contention, is much more deplorable and quite as common, and we need not go to 'Greenland's icy mountains' to find it!

The union of Christendom without the Spirit of Christ is an impossibility, and what divides Christians is not so much difference of ritual as want of charity in dealing with it.

CHAPTER IV

'STONES FOR BREAD'

'MAY I come in, Francis?'

Father Philmore sighed impatiently. He hated being interrupted when he was writing his sermons, or indeed at any other time, for the matter of that, and no one did interrupt him but his mother. It is strange how tactlessly bold timid people can sometimes be.

She would burst in upon him with the smallest excuse, or without one at all, as it often seemed to Father Philmore, and then go away looking sad because he had snubbed her. He did not want to snub her, but she made him irritable. He learned to dread these visits. The sound of her step coming hesitatingly down the passage, and the peculiar flop of the loose felt slippers she always wore. She would pause at the door and breathe hard, or fumble with the handle, to let him know she was there. If a person is going to interrupt you, they may as well do it at once and not hesitate on the threshold, but poor Mrs. Philmore had hesitated on the threshold all her life, and she hesitated more than ever now that she lived with her son!

In fact, she had actually developed nerves lately, and some days they were so bad that she could not even make up her mind to speak to him, but, after preparing her speeches until they sounded absurdly stilted, never uttered them for fear of a snub.

And all the time he did not guess what lay behind the silence—that she had grown to care for him.

He saw her shrink from him, and pitied her for it, with a pity that was half-contempt, but he never guessed how the contempt hurt her.

They say there's no fool like an old fool, but however that may be, Mrs. Philmore was in love for the first time in her life, and with her own son.

She knew now why she had not minded Colonel Philmore's bullying and frequent absences: she had not cared for him! In the same way she had only tolerated his caressing intervals; how different they would have been, she thought, from her son! But then she could not have expected it. Francis was never caressing, and yet she loved him! It was chiefly imagination, poor little woman. For to love the actual man, at this stage of his existence, was almost impossible. Affection cannot usually stand more than a certain amount of cold water, but Mrs. Philmore's must have been of an exceptionally sturdy character, for it struggled up after each successive dose, with unabated vigour!

There are some people who can love on patiently all their lives with no hope of return. Mrs. Phil-

more's affection was of this character. She would sooner have a blow from the beloved hand than a caress from any other.

She attended the services at S. Sebastien's diligently and uncomprehendingly, day after day, for the purpose of worshipping her son afar off, and she used to wonder vaguely sometimes what it all meant, but there was no one to enlighten her, except Mrs. Crouch, whose opinion she did not choose to ask.

It never occurred to Father Philmore what an opportunity he was losing of breaking up 'fallow ground,' and yet he was always asking of himself why he failed to win people's affection; why, with all his pains, life did not yield him of her best. Mourning his lost opportunities while here was one ready to his hand.

He might have done much for his mother at very little cost to himself. A few crumbs of comfort would have been enough for Mrs. Philmore. She was one of those people who are quite content with the fragments that remain.

And, because she asked so little, as is often the way, she received nothing. Her son never thought of her at all, except on the rare occasions when she neglected something that he wanted done, or did it so tremblingly and slowly that he was almost tempted to regret the nimble-fingered, if sharptongued, Mrs. Crouch!

It was one of the sad things in life, these two living so near together, and yet so far apart! She irritated him, and he repelled her. Each was at their worst in the other's presence, and they both felt it without knowing why.

Father Philmore mourned over what he had heard called his 'unbearable manner,' as he mourned over all his deficiencies, but he did not know how much it hurt his mother. He did not think it possible that she could love him, because he had given her so little cause.

He was a man upon whom natural affections had very little hold. He would not have thought of loving his mother because she was his mother, and he gave her credit for the same sentiments!

'I've brought you these papers, Francis,' she said, about the Harvest Festival.'

'But I thought we agreed that you should look through them, and correct the printer's error in each copy?'

'Yes, Francis, and so I have; but I just brought them for you to glance through and see that they're all right.'

He made a movement of impatience. That was the way she always acted. She would offer to do a thing to 'save him trouble,' and, in the end, give much more trouble than if he had done it himself!

Still he did not say anything, but took the papers from her, and looked them through, smiling at the childishness of the request. 'Yes; they're all right,' he said, 'and very nice indeed.'

That was her dismissal, but still she lingered, standing behind his chair.

'Is there anything more?' he said in a tone of resignation.

'Only—only, Francis, has it been a very good harvest?'

'A good harvest! Of course not; the worst we have had for years.'

'Then, Francis, how can we be thankful?'

It was rather like Doris' grace over the nasty dinner, but Father Philmore did not smile. The limit of irritable people's endurance is soon reached.

'Really, mother,' he said, 'I haven't time to enter into the vexed question of half a loaf being better than no bread. And what do you want me to do? Put off the festival? I'm afraid I can't improve the harvest! If so, will you telegraph to the preacher?'

She turned away then, and he knew there were tears in her eyes, so he did not look at her. He only felt with relief, by the sound of her voice, that she was approaching the door.

'You know, Francis,' she said reproachfully, 'I didn't mean it so.'

Father Philmore felt positively wicked by the time she had closed the door! He hated to be put in this position—to be made to feel himself perpetually in the wrong; and he sometimes won-

dered what would happen if his mother went on living with him always!

He had never loved his father. They were only alike in one point—their iron wills, which, as the younger Philmore grew up, were continually clashing.

Colonel Philmore called his son a Pharisee, not unnaturally, for, even in those days, the young man had an unveiled contempt for his father's bluster, and various other propensities. However, now it sometimes struck him that the Colonel had been somewhat to be pitied. He recalled one remark of his with a good deal of sympathy, that 'to live with a woman who was afraid to call her soul her own without asking your permission, was enough to drive a man to anything!'

When his mother had gone he walked about the room irritably. She had wasted all his morning, and it was too late now to collect his thoughts and settle to anything. He reviewed the years since she had been with him. Ten years; and there had never been the smallest approach to confidence between them!

Was she happy, he wondered. Mrs. Crouch knew, probably. She and his mother were very good friends now?—better friends than the vicar and Mrs. Crouch had ever been; but then the vicar made no friends. He had made enemies, and plenty of them; he was the sort of man who runs full tilt against his foes.

For the people who opposed him, Father Philmore had absolutely no toleration; but for those who yielded, there was always a soft spot in his armour.

To the weak and ailing in mind and body he had been always merciful. How was it that his poor little mother received so little consideration at his hands? He did not know. It was simply, 'I do not like thee, Dr. Fell,' and yet what right had he to use those words who was a veritable 'Dr. Fell' himself?

People liked his mother—Mrs. Leary and she were very good friends—but no one liked the vicar. That was the plain truth, and, like all plain truths, unpalatable.

But he faced it, as he sat in the old study in his self-imposed loneliness, with his head on his hands.

He could not resume the train of thought which his mother had interrupted. He had driven her away, as he drove every one away; even little Doris would not speak to him now!

Well, he had himself to blame: he had chosen a lonely path; gone out of his way to make himself unpleasant; deliberately closed his heart to the softer influences of life; deliberately allowed himself to be embittered by a youthful infatuation. He had literally hated all men for the sake of one.

The habit of kindness can be cultivated like any other habit. With some it requires no cultivation; with Father Philmore it would have required a great

deal. But he had never tried, and now he had lost the power.

When he spoke at all he spoke irritably; he felt irritable, and it saved trouble. No one gainsaid him; they were afraid to; only, by degrees, they dropped off, and left him alone with his religion.

And was it enough for him? He had told Father Methuen that he was quite content to be 'given to, God,' and so he had proved.

He was a practical man, not given, like Methuen, to self-analysis, but to-night he was in a retrospective mood.

The years held a fair record of solid work, of hard duties done, and hardly one left undone; of real self-denial for the sake of others, and of many an act of kindness done in secret, to prevent the recipients from 'calling him blessed'—a process which he particularly disliked.

His youthful self-righteousness had become a proud indifference to the 'applause of men,' which really covered an ultra-sensitiveness as to their opinion; but the hard doctrines which he had preached in the dogmatism of youth, he had practised and applied to himself.

With stumbling feet and aching heart he had trodden in what he imagined to be the path of duty. He had found his religion hard, and his God hard, as he himself was, and as he believed his fellow-creatures to be.

As to his work, it had prospered in a way. Workers had gathered round him, stimulated by his example, and attracted by his zeal for souls.

To them he was emphatically a 'Priest'; a machine for the discharge of certain functions, but hardly a man.

And yet he had lived among them for twelve years now; twelve years of self-constituted exile from his fellow-creatures, of inward bitterness poorly veiled by outward pride.

He was just as aloof from them in his daily life as when he stood in the pulpit. His very reputation for holiness set him on a pinnacle, and it is somewhat of a strain to be always looking up.

They pictured him as living on the heights of Pisgah, above the insignificant joys and sorrows of our everyday life, little knowing how much of his time was spent in the valley of humiliation!

Father Philmore's was a very intense nature. He gave unreservedly, and Methuen had taken his all.

When he rose from his lonely vigil at the altarsteps to begin his new life, he had no heart left.

He could not help it. Everything that he had he gave; but faith in his fellow-creatures was not his to give: his faith had been slain, and he thought that works would take its place.

He toiled very hard trying to atone to God and man for his want of love, hoping that, like Cornelius, his prayers and his alms would come up for a

memorial before God—that God of his imagination, who was a God of Works; a God to be propitiated by outward acts; by mortifications of the flesh, and by lip-service; a God to be offended by one penance forgotten, or one prayer left unsaid through weariness!

No wonder that Father Philmore was called a bigot by his enemies, and a ritualist by every one!

There was no heart in his religion because there was no heart in him; but he loved this dreary round of forms and ceremonies as well as he loved anything. It was his God. He had mistaken the shadow for the substance; the anti-type for the type. No wonder that his sermons on doctrine and ritual were the best, for in dealing with them he was on familiar ground. He was an honest man, and he could not point them to a God he knew not. Faith and loving-kindness were dead letters to him: they meant nothing; but the doctrine of Sacrament and Sacrifice he thought that he understood well.

His life was a perpetual effort at atonement for his own hardness of heart; a pleading, through the merits of another, for the sins which, while he mourned, he did not apparently make any very great efforts at correcting.

That was the strange part of it with such a practical man.

He brought his 'gift to the altar,' and yet neglected the palpable duty of being 'reconciled to his brother.' The 'confession' and 'contrition,' were there, but the 'amendment of life' was too great an effort.

He could make, or thought he could, one supreme sacrifice, but the crumbs of kindness which life requires from us every day, were too much for him to give.

His mother asked them of him; his people asked them—that bread of human sympathy which is the food of our common life, but they asked in vain; the stone of fear was all that he had to give them. And, as he put nothing into life, it yielded him nothing, and he could not justly complain.

His own attitude was reflected by those of his parishioners who felt with him. They saw, with his eyes, a stern God, who must be served by weariness of the flesh. A pitiless God, who required long hours of kneeling, rosary in hand, and the harder the floor, and the weaker the knees, the more meritorious the act. A commercial God, too, who literally extorted so many pounds of flesh in return for Heaven, and made life a perpetual penance for the poor mortals who had not yet 'put on immortality!'

As usual, Father Philmore had his chief following among the youth of the congregation, and, as a natural result, the usual grumbling from parents as to duties left undone, and health ruined!

In some cases the duties and the delicacy were bond fide, in others they were fictitious, but, in both instances, Father Philmore turned a deaf ear. His

advice was uncompromising. He had no toleration for those who loved 'father or mother' more than, what he termed, their 'church privileges.'

It is to be feared that certain of his flock looked upon these privileges as doubtful blessings, like Mrs. Leary's mercies! And it was hardly surprising, seeing that they were still encumbered by their 'mortal coils,' those tiresome bodies, which, although desiring nothing better than a walk to church before breakfast on a fine sunny morning, found it a doubtful privilege when a mizzling rain was falling, and a 'sou'-wester' blowing umbrellas inside out, and waterproofs on to the top of one's hat!

The flesh, even of Catholics, is weak, and it is difficult on such mornings not to value a warm bed more than one's 'church privileges.'

The body has a most tiresome habit of asserting itself on these occasions, and as no one knows this better than the God who made our 'feeble frame,' it is an open question whether we should not worship him quite as acceptably with warm hands and feet.

However, Father Philmore thought not, so he and his following continued their shivering devotions in a church that, for purposes of economy, was kept during the winter at an atmosphere just above freezing!

'After all, sir,' an unconsciously humorous parishioner of Father Philmore's once said when airing his grievances, 'I back your "works" against Mr. Leary's faith! It's a very dangerous doctrine. that justification by faith-lets a man do anything he likes all his life, and then expect heaven to drop into his lap at the eleventh hour, without his having done anything to deserve it, except say "I believe," which any scamp can do! But as I said to some one the other day, our vicar do work for heaven, and if he wants to get there in his own way, I for one don't blame him. As to his being "cock-sure," he'll have that taken out of him when he joins the great majority, and finds his self all wrong: or if, mayhap, he finds his self all right, he'll be a bit lonely even then, Catholics being in such a minority, and all the rest of the world against him. Anyway, vicar don't do any harm with his good works that I have ever heard of, and I'm sure the Almighty will remember that to his credit, even if he don't ever get to Heaven, which, says I, I heartily hope he will! Yes, sir, it would please me uncommon to give you a welcome there. Make it seem more natural-like for me.'

The thanks which Father Philmore tendered for this kind invitation would have penetrated the armour of any one but an aggrieved parishioner on the war-path, who, as every one knows, is capable of advising not only his vicar, but the Almighty Himself!

Father Philmore never argued with this class of person that 'faith and works' were not absolutely

incompatible, but he could not reciprocate the hope of a future meeting, though the idea of a lonely Heaven after such a very lonely earth, was somewhat depressing.

After all, even in this garbled and burlesqued version, there were some shreds of truth. He did think himself 'cock-sure,' as his critic elegantly put it. In other words, he did think himself right, and all the rest of the world wrong. He divided his fellow-creatures into 'Catholics and heathen,' just as Mr. Leary peopled hell in imagination with the followers of the Scarlet Lady, and heaven with the congregation of the 'Whosoever will' Gospel Hall, the space that was over to be left presumably for the angels!

It seems a strange idea that the God of created millions should lodge his whole truth with any one body of men, and even Father Philmore could not help owning that 'instructed Catholics' did sometimes differ among themselves. There were some 'of Paul,' and some 'of Cephas,' but very few, he thought, sometimes despairingly, 'of Christ.'

He knew, too, that in a way it was his fault. The 'brother whom he had seen' he certainly did not love, and the God 'whom he had not seen' was therefore worshipped in fear and trembling; love being one of the things which cannot be taught by precept. Meantime the 'enemy blasphemed,' seeing, as enemies will, the weak points in their foes' armour.

Father Philmore thought sometimes that in the hands of another vicar, things might have been better. The people, being very ordinary themselves, wanted a more normal man to deal with them.

Father Philmore's ultra-sensitiveness as to their opinion, which they could not help discovering, and yet his absolute and amost brutal disregard of the conciliation and ordinary courtesy which would have obtained it, puzzled them.

There was something out of proportion, too, about his way of looking at things, probably induced by his solitary habits. He would brood over trifles, till they assumed an exaggerated importance. In fact, he was too conscientious, and it made him hard on himself and others.

His mother weighed on his mind just now in the shape of a neglected duty. If he could not give her the affection she craved, he could at least be less irritable. She should have the 'half-loaf,' which would make her life more bearable.

With him to resolve was to do, but he opened the door and went down the passage which separated his study from the rest of the house, with steps almost as hesitating as his mother's.

As he knocked at the door of her little sittingroom, which, as the smallest and draughtiest and altogether most uncomfortable room in the whole house she had, characteristically, requested might

be set apart for her, he felt an instinctive sympathy with her nervous knock at his study door.

After all, it requires a certain amount of courage to interrupt any one when we are not quite sure of our welcome, and he felt that it would be only just retribution if the reception he met with matched his own. He had not entered her room, of his own free will, since he was a little boy—a strange, unhappy, little boy, driven from pillar to post between his father's tyranny and his mother's effusion.

His voice sounded quite strange. After all, he could sympathise with his mother. Perhaps it was because they were alike that they did not get on very well.

'May I come in, mother?' he said.

CHAPTER V

'HALF A LOAF'

THERE was no response to Father Philmore's knock, and he heard voices inside in animated conversation; at least one, which he recognised as Mrs. Crouch's, was animated.

'I should stand up to him,' he heard her say.
'The more you cringe, the more you may! Men are all alike, priests or no priests. They may "say long prayers" in the sanatorium—what do you say? Synagogue? Oh, well, it's all the same, but their God is themselves, not to say their belly.'

Father Philmore smiled as he stood outside. Of all the charges which had been brought against him, this was the last he had expected. He had been accused of many things, but never before of eating too much!

He knocked again more loudly, and this time there was a sound of scuffling inside, after which Mrs. Crouch came to the door, and flung it defiantly open.

'Well, I'm blest!' she said, when she saw the vicar.

He looked over her head towards his mother, who had risen from her seat, and stood nervously twisting her hands together, and trying to look pleased, and as if her son was in the habit of visiting her daily. In reality she was wondering to what crime on her part his appearance was due.

'May I come in, mother?' he repeated, making an effort to pass Mrs. Crouch without the loss of dignity consequent on two very determined people intentionally blocking each other's progress through a small doorway.

'Come in, Francis, come in, of course,' said Mrs. Philmore nervously. 'I'm — I'm delighted to see you.'

Mrs. Crouch watched his entrance with evident suspicion. 'Now I wonder what he wants?' she soliloquised. 'No good, I'll lay.' Then she transferred her regard to Mrs. Philmore. 'You're delighted to see him, are you? Well, if you don't swing for that, like Ananias and Sapphira, it's because the Lord is more merciful nowadays. Not but what he'd have his work cut out,' she added, 'if every liar was struck dead, for there wouldn't be anybody left alive!'

So musing, Mrs. Crouch unwillingly retired, perhaps warned by a certain expression on the vicar's face. She took the precaution, however, to remain within earshot. She might be wanted, either to defend her mistress, or to 'carry her out,' in case the fate of

Sapphira overtook her. 'The heart of man is desperate and deceitfully wicked,' she muttered, as she turned reluctantly from the door; 'not but what the heart of most women runs him pretty close.'

Father Philmore's heart was decidedly 'desperate' just then—it was in his boots, as the saying is.

He sat down on the only comfortable chair in the room, from which his mother had carefully removed her belongings in readiness for him, and he thought despairingly that the preparation of twenty sermons would be a joke compared to this. In desperation he stared after Mrs. Crouch's retreating figure. 'Where has she gone?' he said, just for the sake of saying something.

His mother sprang up with alacrity. 'Shall I call her back, Francis?' she said, eagerly—a trifle too eagerly, Father Philmore thought, to be flattering to him. 'Was it to see her that you came?'

'My dear mother, of course not. Do sit down. I came to see you.'

Mrs. Philmore stifled a sigh. 'I'm delighted, Francis, as I said; I—I hope you'll come again.'

That was what the boys call a 'whopper,' but Mrs. Philmore prayed that she might be forgiven under the plea of extenuating circumstances. C'est le premier pas qui coûte. When we have once perjured our souls it is comparatively easy to go on.

Silence fell between them after that, which was, of course, broken by the woman. 'If you object,

Francis,' she said, 'to her sitting with me, I'll—tell her.'

This was really a huge effort at self-denial, for Mrs. Crouch's visits were very often the only break in her day, and she hoped that it might atone for that big lie which she had just told.

She waited tremblingly for her son's answer.

'My dear mother,' he said, 'of course I don't object. I'm not quite such a brute.'

'A brute, Francis! Oh no. I'm sure you're kindness itself.'

Father Philmore smiled grimly. He could not help wishing that his mother would not punctuate every sentence with his Christian name.

'I'm afraid you're often rather lonely,' he continued.

'Well, Francis, not exactly lonely! Only she cheers me up a bit. We talk, you know.'

'I daresay,' said Father Philmore.

'Not but what she does most of the talking, Francis. I just sit and listen.'

'So I should imagine.'

'But, Francis, we never gossip. Never: I wouldn't do it. Colonel Philmore always said that one of my few virtues was that I never gossiped!'

Father Philmore smiled more kindly. Poor little woman, if only she had not been so self-depreciating, they might have got on better, he thought; but there was something in her fear of him that repelled him

for, after all, his unkindness had been chiefly negative.

'I'm afraid,' he said, 'that we are rather alike. I haven't many virtues either, or I shouldn't have let you have the smallest room in the house!'

It wasn't a particularly complimentary speech on close examination, but Mrs. Philmore was immensely flattered by it.

- 'But, Francis, I like small rooms. I do, indeed. You see it's big enough for me, and, and——'
 - 'Mrs. Crouch,' supplemented her son.
- 'No, Francis, I was going to say for you, when you care to come. Oh, don't take me out of it,' imploringly, 'I've grown so used to it; and I've got all my things round me here. Do let me stay!'

Mrs. Philmore had that affection for places which is supposed to belong to a certain feline animal, but, in her case, it was the result of a clinging nature attaching itself to the only available object.

Father Philmore was irritated and almost shocked at her entreaties.

'My dear mother,' he said, 'one would think I wanted to evict you by force! You can be where you like, of course. But I didn't come here to talk about the room. I came to apologise for my unkindness.'

Here Father Philmore was on more familiar ground. He had always been rather too good at owning his faults.

- 'But, Francis, you haven't been unkind, I'm sure!'
- 'Don't let us split straws about it,' he said; 'you know I have been sharp with you.'
- 'Well, Francis, perhaps, a little; but I daresay it was my fault.'
- 'Well, partly,' he said, smiling. 'Why are you so afraid of me?'

Mrs. Philmore might have justly retorted, 'Why does a burnt child dread the fire,' but she wisely refrained; her son's rare good-humour must be respected, and she would not jeopardise it by any word of hers.

- 'If you were always like you are now, Francis,' she said adroitly, 'it would be different.'
- 'I'll try,' said Father Philmore nobly, whereupon having gained the inch, she instantly proceeded to take the ell.
- 'And, Francis, if I might always come into your room without knocking, and you came into mine in the same way, wouldn't it,' timidly, 'seem more homelike?'

Father Philmore groaned within himself: he had visions of privacy invaded at all hours, of study disturbed, of papers rifled; of the thousand-and-one ways peculiar to the bachelor and the student becoming public property, and common talk between his mother and Mrs. Crouch. Then he remembered joyfully what a noise she always made in the passage, and took courage. After all, he would always know

when she was coming. What a good thing she was not conscious of it herself!

But he need not have been afraid. The poor little woman had repented of her bargain almost before the words were out of her mouth.

'I think, Francis,' she said, 'that if you wouldn't mind letting me know when you are coming, it might be better.'

He smiled as he stood up to go, with the sense of a duty done.

'All right,' he said, 'you're to come when you like, and I'm always to let you know when I'm coming! Rather a one-sided and womanly bargain, isn't it? Not that I mind a bit. I think it's a very good plan. Now I must go.'

'Yes, I won't keep you, Francis. But thank you for coming. I'm very glad you came.'

Yes, she was very glad that he had come, but equally glad that he was going, and so was he. The interview had been a strain to both of them. When he was safely in his own room again, he said to himself, bitterly, that there was only one person who had never been afraid of him; and his thoughts flew, with the swiftness of truth, to the one passion of his life. Yes, all else had been a pretence; a pretence at living, a pretence at being satisfied with duty; a pretence at being self-sufficient. The old heart hunger was strong on him to-night. There are some few natures which never forget!

A sharp knock came to the study door: he answered 'Come in,' with more than his usual impatience, wondering if he was to be always on the strain. It was not his mother, but Mrs. Crouch this time.

She glanced round suspiciously, as if to see whether he had purloined any of Mrs. Philmore's belongings. 'It's the nurse to see you,' she said grudgingly.

Mrs. Crouch disapproved of the parish nurse, as she disapproved of a good many other parochial institutions, and she particularly disapproved of her visits to the vicar. She always spoke of her contemptuously as 'that nurse,' and in private her language was even stronger. 'Business, indeed,' she would say—'a pettifogging excuse! As if any fool couldn't guess what their business is!'

'Show Miss Evans up,' said the vicar briefly, emphasising the name, and Mrs. Crouch unwillingly departed on her unwelcome errand.

She had no intention, however, of obeying her instructions to the letter. She went downstairs, and, pausing on the last step, beckoned to the nurse, 'You can come up,' she said, and as Miss Evans passed her, she drew her dress away, and looked hard at her.

'Show her up, indeed,' she muttered, after the last flutter of the nurse's black garments had disappeared up the stairs. 'Ay, I'll show her up some day, in a way that will open their eyes!'

CHAPTER VI

HER NATIVE HEATH

VISITORS often came to inspect S. Sebastien's. Being a fine building in itself, and the only church of the sort in the neighbourhood, it had risen to the proud position of 'a feature of local interest,' as the guidebooks put it. In the summer all 'sorts and conditions' of sightseers invaded it, much to the consternation of the lady-workers, who would follow the intruders round, at a respectful distance, with an air of protest, which implied that the mischief found by Satan for idle hands, had a special application to holiday-makers inspecting churches.

The tripper-class usually tiptoed about in aggressively squeaky boots, pointing at everything, including the ladies, and uttering loud-voiced criticism or admiration, as the case might be, with the assurance of perfect ignorance.

They always poked their noses into every hole and corner, including the vestries, where they opened the cupboards, and took a lively interest in the dusters and brooms, unused altar vases and frames for decorations. Even the choir surplices, hanging

harmlessly behind the door, did not escape them, and the outside of the vestment cupboard, which happened to be labelled, had a breathless pause all to itself.

The inside, luckily, was guarded by lock and key; the vicar having his own ideas as to pearls and swine.

On very rare occasions, when he 'spotted' a visitor of appreciative mind, he would take this rara-avis round himself, and show him, or her, the inside of the schools and the outside of the parsonage, which was all he could manage, his mother having implored him not to 'make a show of her.' And on one occasion he had been known to unbend so far as to ask, 'Have you seen our nurse and our Cottage Home?' But this was an immense condescension, the nurse and the Cottage Home being institutions very near and dear to the vicar's heart.

Nurse Evans was more or less of a new-comer herself, but she had managed, in a wonderfully short time, to become an important part of the parochial machinery.

One hears so much, in these 'Puss in the Corner' days, of round sticks in square holes, that it is quite a refreshing change to find a person who has not only discovered her right niche, but managed to fit herself into it.

This the nurse at S. Sebastien's had undoubtedly done. She had come in answer to an advertisement

in the *Church Times*, and she rented a small house, which was called the Cottage Home, and held herself and her patients.

There was a sitting-room where she had her meals, and invited any favoured convalescents, or outside friends, to share them; a tiny bedroom and a kitchen for the old woman who did the cooking, and helped her to nurse the patients when the Home was full.

Nothing came amiss to Beryl Evans. She visited at the vicar's discretion any sick cases in the parish. In fact, she was a sort of 'free lance,' and went wherever she was wanted, which was almost everywhere.

She had brought the most hardened sinners, of both sexes, to Bible-classes and Mothers' Meetings, where they were 'let down gently,' by means of coffee and marmalade, in preparation for severer ordeals later on; and persuaded the most prejudiced mothers to have their babies 'done' by standing godmother herself, till the number of her godchildren became appalling.

The children in particular hung round her, and were almost willing to persuade themselves that they were ill, for the pleasure of being nursed by her.

'What is your "open sesame"?' the vicar asked her, when he saw the affection for the want of which he had worn himself secretly to skin and bone, bestowed on Nurse Evans in almost overwhelming

profusion. 'It is very simple,' was the reply; 'I only love them,' at which the vicar had shaken his head in despair.

Yes, that was her recipe: a very well known one, that to get anything worth having we must put our heart into our efforts. We must give not only our time but ourselves.

She often felt tempted to quote to the vicar the old proverb about 'he that will have friends.' It seemed so plain to an onlooker, why he failed; but she refrained, having learned by experience that other people's mistakes have a way of appearing plain!

Nurse Beryl did not look a young girl, and yet she certainly was not old, but then Faith, Hope, and Charity are a wonderful tonic, when properly mixed and regularly taken, and their effect is seldom traced to the right cause because the remedy is so little tried.

Nurse Beryl would romp with the children, and enjoy it very often more than they did: some of them being very puny and solemn-looking specimens; in fact, she taught them to play as she taught them to love, by example. No one who saw her with a baby in her arms would need to ask what was her 'open sesame,' at any rate, to the hearts of the mothers. She seemed to have a never-ceasing flow of health and spirits, which she communicated to all with whom she came in contact.

Old patients were often surprised to meet their sedately dressed nurse running instead of walking, as if she must get over the ground as quickly as possible to work off her surplus vitality. She ran like one to the manner born; and, in spite of her cumbersome garments, with the ease and grace which accompany great physical strength.

The vicar said it was a case of the 'merry heart,' but although she certainly went 'all the day,' and all the night too, sometimes, she did not look to have exactly 'a merry heart.'

It was a strange, contradictory face; so passionate, and yet so self-contained and strong; so full of possibilities in all directions, and yet so restfully content in the present, that one almost fancied that the history, which no one doubted that she had, must be a closed page. Otherwise a creature so full of life could hardly have been satisfied with what seemed, to a casual observer, a rather one-sided existence.

No wonder the vicar valued her. Among the 'quips and cranks' and spasmodic proceedings of the ordinary church-worker, some one who came to the early service more regularly than to her breakfast, and attended matins and evensong with the same punctuality, was a treasure indeed.

It was no hard sense of duty that brought Beryl Evans to church. She simply came for what she could not get elsewhere.

The church was her home; the tending of it her joy and pride; the learning of its doctrines and mysteries, her greatest privilege.

When she had done all that she could she longed to do more, out of simple love and gratitude to the Giver of all good, for providing the undying portion of her with its 'daily bread.' It is strange how perverted our minds are in regard to the relative importance of temporal and spiritual blessings. The fact is, that we do not grasp the reality of eternity, or we should not labour for the 'meat that perisheth,' and yet, 'to eyes that see,' each one of us is stamped with the hall-mark of another world. We come from something, and we go to something, and it is the way we use the intermediate stage of this life that settles whether that something is for 'better or worse.'

We go either to the 'God who is our Home,' or to the 'prison house,' which we have prepared for ourselves. Either 'trailing clouds of glory,' or in the 'utter nakedness' of those for whom no 'wedding garment' is prepared, because they have 'eaten their marriage feast on earth.'

We think vaguely, most of us, of 'a future state' as a sort of old-age pension which will come in handy by-and-by. Meantime we are sailing in 'a painted ship, upon a painted ocean.' Childhood and youth and prime drop from us as we drift along, each with the same warning that 'we die daily.'

The childish troubles that were once so real are

foolishness to the man who has put away childish things; the bereavement of twenty, ten, or even five years ago is as nothing comparatively to-day, and the deduction is obvious. That, as the child is to the man, so is the body to the spirit. That, if even in this life, the sponge of time wipes our past troubles from the impressionable slate of our minds, Eternity will cure them in a flash, by rectifying our vision for weal or woe. In the light of God's smile, or the darkness of His frown, the things of this world will fall naturally into their proper position. When we pass from the 'sleep' of life to the 'true waking' of death, we shall realise that to 'sell our birthright for a mess of pottage,' is to be 'penny-wise and pound foolish,' and just a few realise it now.

Nurse Evans was one of them. She was blest with an uncommonly large stock of faith. Some of it was natural to her, and some of it had been acquired by the experiences which life holds for all of us, though only to very few is it granted to bring out of those experiences the little faith 'that they had.' Beryl's was a case of 'to him that hath shall be given,' but what her experiences had been, no one knew. The nurse could keep her own counsel. The history of nearly every one in the parish had been drawn out by her ready sympathy, but she gave no confidence in return.

It was not much wonder that such an active worker should make some enemies, particularly as her

activity was combined with popularity. Mrs. Crouch was one of them, but not even her sharp tongue could find much to say about Nurse Evans—simply because there was nothing to be said. Her present conduct was irreproachable, and to her past they could get no clue.

CHAPTER VII

'A DANIEL COME TO JUDGMENT'

As Beryl Evans entered the vicar's study unannounced, her head was too full of her own business to have a thought to spare for Mrs. Crouch's unceremonious treatment.

Father Philmore's own manner usually left much to be desired, but in this case, any one who knew him well would have noticed that he treated this woman differently to most; with a certain amount of deference that was altogether absent from his usual manner.

Nurse Evans plunged straight into her subject, hardly waiting to take the chair which the vicar placed for her.

'I have come about Molly Grant,' she said.

Father Philmore's face darkened perceptibly: Beryl knew the signs well. Molly Grant was one of the few topics on which they differed; a sort of incipient bone of contention, which each approached warily.

Molly was a girl in the Rescue Home in whom Nurse Evans was specially interested.

A great deal of her work lay there, and the vicar was sorry for it. He strongly disapproved of what he considered the modern pampering of certain sins, and was sorry to see signs of this tendency in his otherwise sensible nurse.

He never liked Beryl less than when she pleaded for Molly Grant. In fact, he almost went so far as to think her pleadings unwomanly, and Beryl knew it, with the knowledge we have of a want of sympathy on the part of those who are generally sympathetic, and for whose opinion we care.

She was very cautious not to gush on the subject of Molly, but to keep as strictly as possible to facts.

There was none of the hesitancy of a young man and a young woman discussing a delicate topic about their intercourse; it was purely professional; he was a physician of souls, and she of bodies. That was all.

As the vicar looked at her quietly-strong face, he thought what a blessing it was for him that his nurse had no nonsense about her, though it was a pity that they differed on this one subject.

- 'Is there anything fresh?' he asked. 'I was there last night.'
 - 'She is very ill,' said Beryl.
 - 'I know it. She is dying.'

Beryl started and looked at him.

'My dear Miss Evans, it's the best thing that could happen to her, if you'll forgive my saying so.

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You see on the face of things, there isn't a chance of her keeping straight. By every law of nature history is bound to repeat itself in her case.'

Beryl was silent. There was truth in the hardly uttered words. Poor pretty little Molly, only sixteen, and without a soul in the world belonging to her.

She had been boarded, since her babyhood, with an old-clothes dealer; and, among the dirty finery of that most filthy and degrading profession, the child's natural vanity had no doubt been fed.

The old woman bought from ladies sometimes; it is surprising what grand people sell their old clothes! She would go to these carriage folks after dark, like a criminal whose deeds are evil, and return laden with her great black bundle to her tumble-down little house in a side alley off the seashore.

Sometimes the grand folks' things came by train, but in any case Molly would pounce on them, dress herself in the finest, and, unknown to the old woman, be off to the front to display the bravery of herself in her borrowed finery; to loaf about the streets or on the pier all day, and all night too, if she liked.

The rest was a foregone conclusion. So long as some men are fiends incarnate, and some women weak fools in the hands of a flatterer, will the old story which the vicar hated to hear, be repeated as a warning for the ages, which they will never take.

So long as society is as it is, with one code for the man and another for the woman, so long will the male offender take the privilege which the world accords to his 'superior sex' of escaping scot-free to 'pastures new,' while the weaker vessel is, in the opinion of such men as Father Philmore, condemned to perdition, as Beryl thought bitterly, for a first offence.

She did not particularly believe in hedging off certain sins as 'immorality,' for only the lips of him who is without sin among us have the right to cry 'unclean' to his neighbour.

All sin is a matter of circumstance more or less, and our immunity from any special one is probably not due to excess of virtue, as we fondly imagine, but to lack of opportunity, or at any rate, of temptation.

In this case the girl's vanity had been flattered by her betrayer; she had wanted him to love her, and, if she had mistaken the lowest form of passion for love, who could blame her? She was only a child.

And now, Beryl thought despairingly, she would never know what true love was, for the man who represented God to her either could not or would not teach her; in the Divine love for such as she, he did not much believe, and the human love was outside his comprehension.

After all, it did not much matter. Molly was almost beyond human help. Even Beryl, with all

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her love, could not go down with her into the dark waters, that were closing fast over the child's shrinking soul!

She did not minimise the sin. In that the vicar had done his nurse injustice; it was only that the child's suffering weighed on her as if it had been her own, and, in his perfect incomprehension of this side of her character, the vicar almost thought that it was.

Poor little Molly, with her loving heart, surely she deserved a better fate than to die like a dog; to follow her dead baby to a dishonoured grave!

'As I was saying,' pursued Father Philmore, 'death would have been the best thing that could have happened to her *if* we had seen any signs of repentance.'

'What do you call repentance?' said Beryl, and her voice sounded mocking in spite of herself.

'My dear Miss Evans, what a question for you to ask, who know so well what a "good repentance" is!'

He spoke earnestly, and her eyes fell before his. It was a compliment from him, but this was no time for compliments.

'As a Catholic,' he pursued, 'you must know the danger of a soul that dies in mortal sin! We can only trust it to God's uncovenanted mercies.'

'But she says she is sorry,' faltered Beryl.

The vicar smiled. 'Yes, she is sorry for having

got herself into a mess; I can well believe that. And sorry, too, that she is going to die.'

Beryl thought of Molly's words: 'I wish I was a Catholic! A Catholic priest would forgive me, I know, when I said I was sorry.' Poor ignorant little Molly.

'She is a most unsatisfactory penitent,' pursued Father Philmore. 'I can get nothing out of her except excuses, and that perpetual "I am sorry." As to the name of the man or any details, she won't reveal them even under seal.'

No, Molly was a brave little soul; she would die 'game' to the man who had betrayed her! Beryl wished that she did not admire her for it!

She thought of one of the girl's excuses: 'I loved him.' Such a pitiful and unoriginal excuse; surely she had not made it to this stony-hearted man!

'The child is afraid of you,' she said.

The vicar smiled. 'Very probably, but that, if you will forgive my saying so, is as poor an excuse as hers.'

There was no answering smile on Beryl's face. She had heard of the vicar's hardness, but she had not experienced it before. He had always shown his softer side to her.

Now, fresh from the pressure of Molly's arms, and the touch of her cold little hands—cold with the dews of approaching death; a death which one word from the man beside her would have robbed of half its terrors—she recoiled from him, forgetting how repugnant certain sins are to a man of his stamp.

'A Catholic,' he had called her. Yes, she was a Catholic, but it seemed to her that she was that, and a great deal more, while the vicar was a Catholic first and last! She hated those hackneyed sentences of his, that sounded so unreal; like a lesson he had learned by heart!

She stood up to go. She felt weak and unnerved and sadly disappointed. Who was he to sit in judgment on human frailty?

There was something in him and his hard doctrines from which she absolutely revolted; they chilled her spirit like a breath of north-east wind.

The vicar stood up too, as in duty bound, and Beryl noticed for the first time how dreadfully ill he looked.

He was the sort of man of whom old wives prophesy that he is not long for this world, and it seemed almost cruel to worry him with its faults and follies; though, obviously, he had plenty of his own. His look was not so much heavenly as unearthly.

It was a baffling personality altogether.

Beryl caught herself wondering whether a man could love God and yet have no love for his fellowmen. The vicar certainly relied on something; his religion was real to him; she settled in her own mind that it must be the Catholic Church, and felt the unsatisfactoriness of her conclusion.

'I am sorry,' he said, using Molly's words unconsciously, 'that I cannot feel as you do about this protégée of yours. I believe, and hope we are at one on the principle, but you—forgive my saying so—are blinded by an amiable feminine weakness for the individual.'

Beryl shook her head sadly as she moved towards the door.

'Your heart has gone out to a pretty face,' continued the vicar, 'as women's hearts do, I am told. We priests, you see, have to concern ourselves with the inner beauty. While you are thinking what a pretty picture the child makes, we have the awful responsibility of an immortal soul, dying in unrepented sin; going, in all human probability, to perdition.'

He spoke very solemnly, and Beryl positively shuddered as she went away without touching his outstretched hand.

After seeing her out, Father Philmore deliberately sat down to think over the interview.

His mind was so full of his nurse that he forgot even to grumble mentally at the many interruptions of this disjointed day. 'Yes,' he said thoughtfully, 'I retract my notions as to her being unwomanly. She's a regular woman!'

CHAPTER VIII

'FRAIL CHILDREN OF DUST'

As Beryl Evans walked home, the injustice of the vicar's words rankled in her mind. They were an imputation on her common sense, if not on her morality.

Had she forgotten the inner rottenness in the outward beauty? She knew that people who are hypercritical about the smallest physical or mental imperfection are apt to be remarkably lenient to moral deformity. Was this her case? Had she fallen into the abominable modern habit of thinking sin interesting? No, her conscience acquitted her. She had learned the stern reality of evil too early in life for trifling with it to be possible to her.

The vicar was right that she had drawn a distinction in this case between sins of ignorance and sins against light—between a girl's first offence and a life of habitual evil. She had not numbered little Molly exactly among the criminal class, but, loving the sinner with the love of a strong nature for a weak, she had hated the sin, as every pure woman must hate impurity.

Nurse Evans had a certain regular correspondent on whose letters she lived from week to week.

On a particular day she always developed a keen interest in the movements of the postman, who seldom failed to bring her the special fat budget for which her soul longed.

These letters had a wonderful knack of arriving at the most opportune moments. One was waiting for her to-night when she came in tired out, and the very sight of the envelope did her good.

She put it beside her plate while she ate her solitary tea, much to the disgust of the old woman who brought it in. 'Always letters,' she grumbled; 'living on letters! We've got the half of you, but t'other half is wandering about no one knows where. Not here, anyway.'

Beryl smiled at her. 'Letters must be fattening, then,' she said lightly, 'judging by the size of the half you have here.'

The old woman shook her head in a dissatisfied manner as she hobbled away.

'No one can't say,' she muttered grudgingly, 'as she don't put her heart into her work, but there's a something, and it beats me.'

Yes, it 'beat' most people. There is nothing so baffling as the reserve on one point of an otherwise open person.

Beryl Evans was not, like the vicar all mystery. She was essentially frank, so that when she chose to

hold her tongue upon a certain subject, people were bound to wonder; yet, as that subject happened to be her own past, she had surely a right to her reserve.

Work was slack at the Cottage Home just then, so the nurse had her time free for the outside patients, with whom she might always have had her hands full.

She had seen Molly that morning, and could do nothing more for her at present, so she settled down with a clear conscience, after tea, to read her letter in peace.

As she read it the cloud on her face gradually lifted, and the world looked itself again. The numb, helpless feeling which had oppressed her in the vicar's presence of being surrounded by evil, which she must not attempt to cure in case it defiled her, passed off as the sun disperses a fog.

She thought more kindly of Philmore in his strange aloof life, with its rarified atmosphere of ultra-sanctity, into which none could penetrate; its exalted and somewhat impracticable standards, and its cold purity, due, as she persisted in thinking, to an almost absolute immunity from the sins which so easily beset most of us. Still, from whatever cause proceeding, there was no getting over the fact that Philmore was on a higher spiritual level than the rest of mankind.

Then his bodily frailty, only too apparent to her

professional eye, commended itself to her pity almost as much as that of little Molly.

She smiled to herself at the thought of his indignation at their being classed together. Poor little Molly, a 'frail, earthen vessel' indeed, on whom had been wrecked the passion which her beauty inspired.

It was better, Beryl thought, to be incapable of love, as the vicar was, than to mock it like this. Yet, surely, there was a happy medium; a divine passion for right, which could meet and master the earthly passion for wrong!

Beryl thought so, as she stroked the letter in her hand. That was the strength which most commended itself to her.

A knock came to the door, as she sat idly dreaming, and she sprang up in self-reproach, with the thought of Molly in her mind.

The vicar stood outside, blocking the small doorway with his tall figure. 'I won't come in,' he said. 'But I called to tell you that I have had a message from the Home. The child is dying, and I came for you.'

Beryl did not appear in the least surprised. 'I won't be a moment,' she said quietly, 'if you will come in, and wait.' Then she glanced at him. 'Haven't you a cloak or something?'

'Oh, it doesn't matter,' he replied irritably. 'Please don't bother.'

She turned away, smiling. It was so like him.

As usual, he had more important things than cloaks to think of. But she ceased, after this, to blame Mrs. Philmore, in her mind, for not looking after him better.

Beryl was ready in a few seconds, and she walked along silently at the vicar's side down the few yards of street that lay between her house and the Rescue Home. She stole a glance several times at the sternly set face, wondering what treatment the passing soul would receive at his hands. He was a good man, but sometimes the tender mercies of the wicked are preferable to those of the good!

After all, what did it matter, since neither his sacraments nor her love could go with the child on her long last journey?

As they approached the Home, a woman, who was waiting for them, sprang out from the darkness and blocked their way.

'Then you ain't a-going in,' she said, addressing the vicar, 'to trouble my poor girl's last moments with confessing to you! A poor innocent lamb that didn't know nothing till you came and told her! She's as good as you are, or her either,' pointing to Beryl. 'Who's she, I should like to know, trolloping about with a man after dark, and setting all the place talking. She isn't any better than she ought to be, or you either, I'll wager, for all you set up to forgive sins! So go 'long, and take your confessions with you, and learn to kiss gals fair and square, and above-board.' Here followed a volley of impreca-

tions and obscenity, in the midst of which the matron appeared, and said a few sharp words to the drunken woman, while the vicar and his companion passed into the house.

'That's the old woman Molly lives with,' he said as they went upstairs. 'I know her well, unfortunately, and I'm sorry for the child if her last moments have been disturbed by her.'

Beryl was thankful for the kinder tone.

They parted at the door of Molly's room, he going in alone, and she waiting in an adjoining dormitory.

The pitiful wailing of sickly infants, and the louder tones of the inexperienced girl-mothers, as they tried to hush them, floated up to her, mixed with occasional bursts of rude laughter, that were checked peremptorily by some one in authority.

It was not a very quiet place to die in, Beryl thought, but it did not make much difference to Molly now. She was almost beyond 'earth's noises'; other voices were speaking to her soul. ... Molly had never been rough and rude like those girls. She had only made the mistake of loving too much, of stepping over the boundary line—which once crossed is so impossible to recross—at the invitation of one for whom, by the immunity of sex, no boundary line has ever been drawn.

Poor little Molly! Beryl found herself repeating the words over and over again. She could not think coherently; the strain of waiting was too great. The dormitory, with its long rows of wired-in beds, and its penitential aspect, depressed her. She felt smothered in sin; engulfed in it, as it were.

Instinctively she leaned out of the window. Oh, surely sweeter than the sweet outer air would be the breath of Paradise to the soul that 'pants after God,' but for the soul that desires him not, what welcome can there be? The poor soul that is going against its will with many a backward glance to the sinful pleasures it is leaving behind.

Beryl rested her head on her arms and groaned, She could not honestly feel that Molly was either willing or prepared to die.

It was natural. She was young, and life, even as she had experienced it, was sweet. The words about the wages of sin kept ringing in Beryl's ears.

Oh, what a time the vicar seemed? She went to the door and listened. It was very quiet in there....

'What is he saying to the child?' she cried wildly.
'My poor little child!'

As if in answer to her words, some one touched her arm, and she started violently, and drew her hand across her bewildered eyes.

The light from the gas-lamp in the passage fell full on the vicar's face, and she could not repeat her question. We can trust the wisdom and the justice of those who have 'walked with God.'

CHAPTER IX

'A FRIEND OF SINNERS'

- 'MOLLY has done her duty,' said Father Philmore.
- 'My part is over, and now she wants you.'

He stood aside, literally and metaphorically, to let her pass.

The words were typical. It was always his part to perform the necessary duty, and then to be required no more.

He watched her wistfully as she hurried past him, but she never heeded; it was enough for her that she might go to the child.

She did not see him sink into the chair which she had vacated, and groan in even greater desolation of spirit. She did not hear him say, 'I shall be here if you want me.' She had no thought for him as she left him to his solitary vigil. She was going to take a something, which he had never taken to any dying bed; to meet a love that longed for her, as no one had ever longed for him. When love came into the question, Father Philmore's part in it was always over!

'Molly,' she said. 'My Molly!'

The girl lay panting on her pillows; the dark lashes resting on the delicately tinted cheek, but the clear red and white of her complexion was touched already with that unmistakable pallor from 'the land of shadows.'

She stretched out her hands to Beryl, eagerly, hungrily.

'He's forgiven them all,' she said, 'every one, and he looked like an angel! But,' and she nestled her head contentedly against Beryl's shoulder, 'now love me!'

Poor little Molly, she turned from divinity to humanity with a sigh of relief. 'Now love me': it is the crying need of some natures; not only for the love but for the visible signs and tokens of it.

The words smote on Beryl's heart with a sharp, half-familiar pain. Memory gnawed at her heart-strings, as she bent over the child, caressing the dark cropped head.

It was Molly's great trouble that they had shaved off her mop of thick curly hair. As if such vanities would matter in the land where she was going!

'And is my Molly happy now?' said Beryl. The girl looked up at her with a lovely smile. She was falling asleep as innocently as a baby, with her head on Beryl's arm.

'Yes, I'm happy now,' she said; 'I've got you, and I'm going to dream of him.'

Beryl was in despair. The child was happy

because she had her, but she would not have her long: her love was powerless before the call of death; powerless even to still the tremor that convulsed the frame she held; powerless to paint the land where the earth-bound soul was going with any beauty, that it should desire it!

As for Molly's betrayer, the type of sin, what should he have in common with a soul shriven and made white to meet its God?

For a moment Beryl thought of calling the vicar, but Molly was holding her fast.

She was thinking sadly that perhaps she had been over-confident; perhaps he was, after all, more right as to Molly's state than she, when his step came to the door.

'Miss Evans,' he said, 'a telegram has come for you. Can you leave for a moment?'

Molly was sleeping quietly, and Beryl laid her down, and followed Father Philmore into the next room where a candle was burning.

He turned away while she read her telegram, but he heard an exclamation which sounded as if it was wrung from the depths, and came towards her.

'Is it bad news?' he said.

The conventional words sounded very stiff and inadequate as he uttered them, but the vicar was not the man to assume any personal rights on the strength of his position, or even to use those which it afforded him to the full.

Beryl was white to the lips as she answered. 'Yes,' she said, 'it is bad news. I must go by the first train in the morning.'

The vicar wished that he had the right to ask where, but at any rate, if he could not speak, he could act.

'Is there anything I can do?' he asked. 'There is a train to-night—in half an hour.'

Beryl glanced at her watch. 'It is quite impossible to-night,' she said steadily. 'Let us go back to Molly. I have been away too long already.'

Father Philmore felt absolutely abashed. Whatever the contents of that telegram might be, they had shaken those iron nerves pretty severely, and yet, in the first freshness of the shock, she remembered the claims of a dying outcast.

There was nothing to be done to-night, as she had said, so she brought her mind back by sheer force of will to the performance of the nearest duty.

She returned, with her set white face, to resume her vigil at the dying bed, while the first tribute of admiration that he had ever paid a woman was wrung from the vicar as he followed her. . . .

Molly would not keep her long now. Her peaceful sleep was over; death had her in its icy grip.

She had been dying all alone while Beryl was away, and now she was lying in her last agony.

Not only the physical pain of death, but the consciousness of sin, had come to the soul so soon to behold immaculate purity.

- 'Hold me, hold me!' she cried wildly to Beryl.
 'Don't let me go.'
- 'My child, I can't keep you. You are going to God, Molly, and He is good.'
- 'I know,' she gasped. 'But I don't like good people. They can't understand——'

Beryl thought, despairingly, of how she must have failed in picturing the Divine comprehension that has fashioned us, behind and before, and the Divine love that forgave the woman who was a sinner because she loved much. The child, in grasping human love, had managed, somehow, to miss the Divine, and now it was too late for any lessons except what death could teach. The soul must go in its awful ignorance to face eternal knowledge.

Her dying fancy, roving despairingly among the cold white spirits with whom she imagined that she was to spend eternity, could find no anchorage for her sin-stained, passion-tossed soul. The shrinking of sin from purity is almost as great as the shrinking of purity from sin!

Molly's eyes wandered wildly round the room. 'All good,' she panted. 'You and him!' pointing towards the door, the sharpened senses of death telling her that the vicar was somewhere near. 'No one to understand that I had to do it; that I should do it again if I had the chance.'...

Beryl stooped over the bed, with her lips close to the dying ear.

'Molly,' she said, 'do you remember when I made a puzzle for the children downstairs, that you couldn't think why I always knew the answer? God is like that, little Molly. He made you, soul and body, and He understands.'

... But other problems were occupying Molly's mind: floating hazily before the dying brain... The mystery of our complex being, with its wonderful mixture of divine and human. The narrow line between legal love and illegal passion; so indistinct till we have crossed it, so hard and fast when we have!

It is a small step, apparently, that divides wish and fulfilment, desire and deed, but between them lies the difference of vice and virtue;—the impassable gulf fixed by polite society between 'sinners' and 'just persons'; and, on the wrong side of it, in all the isolation of death, was Molly, while on the other, as it seemed to her fevered fancy, stood her friends and God. . . .

By an almost superhuman effort Beryl recalled the wandering senses. 'Molly,' she said, 'I am not good, and God has forgiven me. But for His grace I should be as you are. Can you hear, darling? Are you listening?'

Yes, she was listening, with a look of dawning hope in her dying eyes, with a smile of love ineffable at the friend who had given her fair fame to soothe a dying bed. . . .

Beryl was conscious of a sharply-drawn breath in the distance that was not Molly's, for Molly was lying very still. . . .

Ah, she had forgotten the vicar: she had thought only of the child; but he was there, hovering in the background, for the place where Beryl sat with the dead girl in her arms was to him 'holy ground.'

He had heard many a confession, but never such a one as this. He thought that he had loved long ago, in the selfishness of youth, but he knew now that he had only touched the outskirts of a love like this—a love which had effectually 'smitten' the chords of self. He had fancied himself possessed of a burning zeal for souls, but had he ever given in exchange for a soul what was of more value than life itself?

CHAPTER X

'A TALE THAT IS TOLD'

IT was very late when the vicar and Nurse Evans left the Rescue Home.

They walked in perfect silence, both busy with their own thoughts, and both, to tell the truth, tired out.

At the door of the church she paused. 'I must speak to you to-night,' she said; 'I have something to tell you.'

'Oh, not to-night,' said Father Philmore entreatingly; 'we are both worn out. Leave it till to-morrow.'

He did not often bring his personal feelings to the fore, but some instinct in him revolted against this interview, and, knowing Beryl, he tried to put it off by an appeal to her pity.

'I shall be gone to-morrow,' she said quietly.

He felt rebuked for his forgetfulness. It was so unlike her to calmly ignore other people that he felt something out of the common must be actuating her.

She was no emotional girl moved by what she had just gone through to a sort of religious fervour which found vent in a request to see him here and now.

Beryl had passed beyond the impressionist stage in which time and place have such an effect upon our religion to that matter-of-fact condition, at which we all arrive sooner or later, when we take emotions for what they are worth, which is practically nothing.

Yes, the vicar had every confidence in Beryl's discretion; he knew perfectly that she would not have chosen such a time if any other would have done, so there was nothing for it but to submit.

Bowing his head in mute assent, he fumbled in his pocket, and producing the key of the church door, let them both in.

It was all in darkness, except for the glow of the sanctuary lamps.

As they passed up the aisle Philmore was conscious of a feeling that some one had followed, and was close behind them.

Leaving Nurse Evans at the entrance to the Lady Chapel, he went into the vestry for the matches, and lighted one gas near the side-altar, glancing carefully round as he did so; but there was nothing, and no one to be seen. It could have been only the extra lively imagination of an overwrought body and brain.

The light fell full on his chiselled, immobile features as he bent his head in grave attention towards the dark, passionate face of Beryl Evans, with its rapidly moving lips.

Several times he checked the eager flow of words

with a movement of his hand, and the same quick, cautious glance around, and several times he shivered perceptibly, and his face changed, as if her words had penetrated that surface-calm which was usually such an effectual mask. . . .

After that tale of shame, which concerned them both, their future relations must be materially altered; their guilty secret would unite and yet separate them.

Already Beryl's attitude towards the vicar had a deference and humility that was new to it, while Philmore would never be quite the same man again as when he entered the church a few moments before.

At the close of the interview he saw Nurse Evans to the door before going back to put out the gas, and as they stood for a moment together, with their figures thrown into strong relief by the light from the church, the vicar bent his head, and said something to his companion, and their hands met in a close clasp.

As he went back into the church, he could have sworn that something or some one brushed past him at the door, and he made a careful search before putting out the gas, but once more in vain.

He thought to himself with a smile of scorn that his nerves were actually making him 'see bogies,' as the children say, but there are no phantoms so real as those of our own creation, and it needed all his courage to leave himself in the dark, save for the small red glow of the sanctuary lamp.

Father Philmore prided himself on being an eminently practical man, but his habits of life prevented him from altogether realising his own ideal. He was growing, perhaps unconsciously, rather morbid.

However, when he knelt for a few moments before the altar, it was with no ascetic desire to lay the last straw on his already overtired body, but from a simple belief that there only was rest to be obtained.

The critical faculty, in its best development, has this advantage, that by making us dissatisfied with ourselves and others, it literally lifts us above earth. We cease to value the world's opinion.

Father Philmore had, in a very real sense, and without any special virtue, his 'conversation in heaven.' He was as little 'of the earth earthy' as it is possible for a son of Adam to be, and this was why, although such an able exponent of divine love, he had with one exception fallen so foul of human affection; its smell of clay disgusted him.

As he knelt there, his tired brain refused to grasp the new ideas that had been presented to it.

When he tried to review his interview with Nurse Evans, and to realise his position with regard to it, memory, by some strange and aggravating trick, persisted in dwelling on the past.

We may scoff as we like at sentiment, but we are

bound to believe in the power of material things to recall the past, because it is a demonstrated fact.

Memory was busy with Father Philmore to-night. Ghosts of former days haunted him. Old doubts that he thought were settled confronted him again, roused into new life by the force of association.

After all, had he laid those doubts of his as to eternal realities?

Yonder dim presence was his God, undoubtedly; that is to say, it was his object of worship. But to have an object of worship is one thing, and to be a Christian, quite another.

Father Philmore had reached the stage of belief, which is something, but he had not yet learned to unite it with practice, which is much harder; his light did not shine sufficiently to make his Christianity attractive to others.

His God was in church, on the altar, and he worshipped It there, but he brought no afterglow of glory away with him, as a rule, for the benefit of his neighbours in everyday life.

He was one of those unfortunate people who rise to the great occasions that seldom come, but fall lamentably short in the everyday life, which is 'always with us.'

As his overwrought nerves gradually recovered themselves in the stillness of the place, he mentally reviewed the kaleidoscopic impressions of the last few hours.

They were chiefly connected with Beryl. First his feeling of repulsion at what he had considered her very lenient and objectionably modern views of sin. Whether they proceeded from too little knowledge or too much he did not know, but he fancied it was one or the other.

The attitude of a man who takes the stand which Father Philmore did on this point is somewhat anomalous. It is a case of the offender turning judge, inasmuch as the man in general is the offending party.

Men prudes, however, are quite as common as women prudes, and more likely to be genuine.

Women may have side motives for their wholesale condemnation of their weaker sisters. Their pretended horror often covers an unsuspected amount of jealousy or curiosity, as the case may be. But when a man sets up to be virtuous, in nine cases out of ten it is bond fide, because, in his case, there is no necessity for pretence.

No one expects a surplus of virtue from a man. In fact, society is more than satisfied with the minimum allowance.

Hence it follows that purity in a man is so much rarer than in a woman, because in him it is a supernatural quality.

For a woman to be pure is no virtue; for her to be the reverse is an outrage against Nature.

Methuen had long ago discovered this abnormal

quality in Philmore. He called it 'prudishness' and 'a strain of puritanism,' and had tried to laugh him out of it, as he had tried to laugh him out of his 'ritualism,' and with equal success.

The man prude is apt to be accused of being a woman-hater, because his wrath descends particularly upon the accustomed head of the weaker vessel. Having such a high ideal of female purity, his mind revolts at the notion of a woman offending by one jot against it; hence Philmore's dislike of Beryl's attitude.

It spoke well for both of them that he altogether sunk his first feeling in heartfelt admiration when he saw her by the bedside of the dying girl, but the testing time came later on, and here Beryl decidedly scored a victory.

He heard her, by her own confession, place herself in the same class as Molly. True, she had been unstrung and excited, but the words were not spoken at random, but of calm, premeditated purpose, to bring, at any cost, the consciousness of divine forgiveness to an immortal soul.

Between Beryl and Molly, the outcast, and the respectable member of society, there was then only the difference of will and deed—the difference that had perplexed the poor dying brain, and which the vicar knew, as a Christian, was no credit to Beryl.

Yes, it was the victory of an individual over a theory. Had he been true to what he called his

principles, he would have discarded Beryl then and there, but in face of what he knew of her, he could not consistently do so. Whatever she might have been, he was conscious only of what she now was, and in view of the grand reality, his airy fabric of theory melted into thin air.

Still a little feeling of conscious generosity had pervaded his mental attitude, quite unperceived by Beryl, and mingled with his warm admiration as he walked home with her, upon which moral uplifting had speedily followed his own downfall, on the hearing of the strange story, which, if it had been poured into his ears by any lips less eloquent of truth, he would have felt inclined to doubt.

As it was, there was nothing to be done but face it; for both their sakes, she would not have told him unless she had been obliged. Also there were certain stubborn facts from which, try as he would, he could not get away. Well, he would never hold his head quite so high again, and he shivered as he stood up wearily in the cold cheerless light of early morning, and crept into the parsonage with a strange new weakness in his heart, a longing for his mother.

CHAPTER XI

'WITHOUT CHARITY'

'MR. LEARY to see you, sir.'

It was noticeable in what a very different tone Mrs. Crouch announced different people.

It is one of the drawbacks of old servants that one cannot preserve a proper amount of dignity before them. They know every expression on our face, and every handwriting on our envelopes, as well, if not better, than we do ourselves.

When Mrs. Crouch announced Mr. Leary, she threw a pitying glance at the vicar, and added a 'sir,' which would have been altogether absent if Nurse Evans, for instance, had been the visitor.

She and 'John' disapproved strongly of Mr. Leary, with the disapproval of the conservative poor who look on the class just above them as upstarts, and prefer being under what they call the 'real quality' as further removed from themselves.

The vicar was sitting by the fire in his mother's room, and, perhaps for the first time in his life, doing absolutely nothing.

His thoughts were with Nurse Evans, speeding,

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probably, as fast as the express could carry her to London, and his expression was unusually meek.

Evidently the vicar was not himself; a fact for which the members of his household were, on the whole, rather glad. There is nothing which takes the spirit out of a man so effectually as ill-health, but Mrs. Philmore preferred to imagine, when her son sat by her fire so contentedly, that he was growing fond of her.

Father Philmore felt pulled to pieces in every sense. He was suffering from the uprooted feeling that one has when one's preconceived ideas are upset; when the old order has changed, and the new has not yet fully established itself.

Between a shock and its effects comes a period of pause. Father Philmore was waiting for something, but what it was he did not quite know, and he wondered, with a little smile, as he rose unwillingly at Mrs. Crouch's summons, whether it could have been for Mr. Leary!

The warden did not often honour his vicar with a visit. When people are diametrically opposed on every point, and neither is prepared to yield one inch, the only safe course is to recognise one another as foes, and to keep apart as far as is consistent with charity, and it is wonderful how elastic Christian consciences are in this matter.

To-day the champion of Protestantism looked extremely oily, in every sense of the word. It was

raining, and he was one of the people whom rain always makes look greasy as well as damp. It mixed with the oil on his hair, and ran in little streams down his face, which he had polished in rubbing off the wet till it shone brilliantly.

The water absolutely trickled off him, and made what Mrs. Crouch called poodles, by way of a compromise between puddles and pools, on the study floor.

It must have been very important business, the vicar thought, that had led the local reformer to expose his valuable life in such inclement weather, but his outward condition did not appear to have damped his inward ardour. Self-constituted martyrs are generally wonderfully supported, their support, like their martyrdom, depending on their own imagination.

Mr. Leary was seated in the most imposing and least uncomfortable chair he could find, which was not saying much, Father Philmore's study being anything but the abode of luxury.

He rose at the vicar's entrance, and bowed grandiloquently, with his usual effect of presenting to view an immense expanse of waistcoat, and somehow recalling to mind the 'proud stomach' alluded to in the Psalms.

After the bow he resumed his seat instantly, and without invitation, while the vicar remained standing opposite to him.

'I have come,' he said, 'on painful and pressing business connected with my office, and the salvation of souls. Nothing else would have brought me.'

'No?' said Father Philmore. 'It is a damp day certainly—for bodies.' He glanced suggestively at the pools which Mr. Leary's body had made on his carpet. 'Couldn't the souls have waited till the rain stops?' he inquired.

'Sir, the Lord's business brooks of no delay; therefore in my character of representative I am here.'

'Indeed,' said Father Philmore. 'Are you not usurping my character? I thought that was one of the charges brought against my unlucky self.'

'Young sir, don't affect to misunderstand me. Your flippancy is ill-timed. Far be it from me, an unworthy instrument, a "frail earthen vessel," to pose as the representative of Jehovah. No, I leave it to you and other misguided—I will use moderation and not say blasphemous—young men, to put yourselves in the place of the Almighty.'

'Then may I inquire,' said Father Philmore, 'in what capacity you have come, that we may understand each other to start with.'

'We shall never understand each other on this side of Jordan,' was the oracular reply. 'Sir, I am the vox populi.' Father Philmore put a mental query after the rest of the quotation. 'The voice,' continued Mr. Leary, 'of Protestant England, reformed

England, and therefore free England, which such men as you are trying to bring again under the abominable tyranny of priestcraft and sacerdotalism, but in vain, while there lives one spark of true British feeling, one spark of the spirit that inspired our glorious Reformation!'

'While, in short, there lives one such champion as you, Mr. Leary, we shall be "kept moving," as you read on the furniture vans.'

Mr. Leary waved away this irreverent comparison of the priestly mind, and literally talked through Father Philmore's words in his eagerness to recover his missing thread. When you have learned a speech off by heart it is very aggravating to be stopped in the middle.

'As I was saying,' he pursued, 'while there lives one spark of the spirit that inspired such men as Cranmer—and, and—Ridley Havergal'—his memory was failing him—'to—to light the martyrs' fires at Smithfield,' he finished desperately.

Under the stress of Father Philmore's polite attention he had become mixed between Protestant martyrs and Protestant poets—between burners and burned!

Stung by the combined deficiency of his history and his memory at such a critical point, he turned viciously on his auditor, who had made the mistake, all through, of treating him as a joke. A fatal mistake with a man of Leary's stamp, whose comic

manner and ignorant phraseology covered more deadly earnest than the vicar dreamed of.

He turned on the man who had dared to laugh at him, with his 'monkey up,' as the boys say.

'Yes, laugh away,' he said viciously. 'But remember they laugh that win. And the day of the Lord is coming for this unhappy parish, that is groaning and travailing under your yoke of scorpions, your tomfooleries and child's play, or rather, devil's play; for the abominations of the Scarlet Woman are the work of the foul fiend himself, aided by such men as you.'

When Mr. Leary worked himself into a pious fervour he invariably waxed abusive.

'How long?' he cried, clasping his hands. 'Are not these things written in the book?'

Father Philmore inquired what book, but received no answer. Mr. Leary not being sure in his own mind, indulged instead in a stream of invectives. He was warming to his subject now, and admired his own eloquence immensely.

'I denounce you all,' he said, paraphrasing unconsciously the words of the baptismal service, 'as whited sepulchres, as wolves in sheep's clothing. I denounce your vain traditions by which you gratify your natural vanity and dress up your sinful bodies to bow and scrape before what you irreverently call your God, thereby insulting the Lord, who dwells in a temple not made with hands.'

Father Philmore, with a picture before his mind of the unbecoming appearance presented by most priests in vestments, smiled to himself.

'I denounce your confessional,' continued Mr. Leary, 'that tool of Satan, by means of which families are divided, and purity sullied, and every evil passion gratified, and by means of which Christian England will be ruined.'

Mr. Leary paused again, but this time Father Philmore did not smile. The discussion had ceased to be comic in his eyes.

'I must refuse,' he said coldly, 'to discuss such a subject with one whose intemperate language puts him beyond the pale of ordinary consideration, and whose absolute ignorance of the topic precludes all possibility of argument.'

Mr. Leary felt a certain sense of satisfaction in having roused the sleeping lion. He knew that in Philmore he had an opponent worthy of his steel.

'But I tell you it shall be discussed,' he said fiercely. 'The time has come for these nefarious practices to be dragged into the light of day. You have taken refuge too long behind the excuse of sacredness. If a thing can be done, it can be discussed, and it shall be, and by me. By me, an injured father, whose child's young affections have been diverted into a wrong channel; transferred from me, her natural guardian, into your keeping! A young stripling like you, who can understand

nothing of the beautiful filial relations of father and daughter, has clouded my child's young innocent mind, and made it crooked, and gloomy, and desperate.'

Father Philmore thought to himself that it had not needed confession to upset the 'beautiful filial relations' between Doris and her father.

He could not help smiling at the idea of Doris, with her little surface affectations and sins, becoming gloomy and desperate!

'Of individuals as such,' he said, in a cold, even voice, 'I know little or nothing. My business is with souls. I am here as a physician, to apply what I believe to be the only remedy for the sickness of mortal sin. The remedy differs, of course, according to the case, but I am to my penitents a medium only for the conveyance of God's pardon, while they represent to me immortal souls for whose spiritual welfare I am bound to care.'

'Very neatly put, sir. You've learned your lesson well, but you won't put me off with "shop." As an injured parent, I ask you, not from personal experience, for I'm proud to say that for fifty years I've confessed my sins first at my mother's knee and since at my bedside, but always most profitably, and with a full assurance of forgiveness.'

'How do you receive it?' said Father Philmore.

'Young man, your speech is like your conduct, unbefitting your sacred calling. I refuse to answer a question asked in a spirit of levity.' 'Pardon me, I asked merely with a view to information. To my mind it is a mystery how a person who goes outside the appointed channels of the Sacraments can have any assurance of receiving the grace which is promised through these channels alone. I am surprised, too, that you have any sins. Seeing so clearly the mote in your brother's eye, I fancied you must have obeyed the scriptural injunction to remove the beam from your own!'

Mr. Leary made a mental note of this speech, but he could not yet afford to let his wrath have way.

'The Lord be praised,' he ejaculated piously, 'that has not given me over to saving my own soul, and neglecting the brethren. I have others to think of. As to that morbidly egotistical habit you call self-examination, it is enough for me that our sins are blotted from God's book: why dwell on them?'

'It is more disagreeable, certainly,' said Father Philmore dryly, 'than dwelling on other people's!'

Mr. Leary glanced at him suspiciously, as he continued: 'I hope I know myself to be a miserable sinner, saved through no merit of mine, and, as one worm of earth to another, I speak to you. As a suffering, injured father, I ask you whether you deny tampering with the affections?'

'I deny nothing,' said Father Philmore. 'If affections are sinful, I certainly tamper with them. Sin, and sin only, concerns me as a spiritual father.'

'Oh! A creditable confession that! But I can

well believe it. Sin is usually interesting to young persons of both sexes, only young men, in general, don't talk about it to young women; it is reserved for the priests to do that, and they do it sometimes, I hear, in a dark church at two o'clock in the morning.'

For the first time Father Philmore was taken off his guard. He winced perceptibly. 'You have been listening,' he said hastily, and his enemy saw his advantage, and pushed it.

'Sir, I advise you to make no charges. But let me remind you of your own words, that confessions are heard in the open church, so that any one may listen.'

'So that any one may see that nothing scandalous happens,' amended Father Philmore. 'As to any one hearing what is between the soul and God, I should say emphatically No. And I may as well tell you at once that what is revealed under seal is sacred, so that any further assumptions as to the private affairs of my penitents will have to be gathered, as I infer your previous information was, by eavesdropping.'

Mr. Leary made another mental note against Father Philmore, but the time had not yet arrived to show his hand.

'I am here in no private capacity,' he replied piously, 'but as the voice of the sheep you are leading to the slaughter. Your people protest, sir. You are forcing on them obnoxious practices, and

driving them from their parish church, perhaps to perdition.'

'Most of the deserters, I am told, go to the "Whosoever will Gospel Hall," said Father Philmore suggestively.

Mr. Leary waved away the interruption. 'They protest, I repeat it,' he continued, 'and they have chosen me as their representative. A proud position for an unworthy vessel, but I have done my best.'

He produced from his pocket a much-thumbed piece of foolscap, and spread it on the table with a flourish.

It contained a letter signed by himself, and followed by a long list of signatures.

'I flatter myself,' he said, 'that I have pretty well canvassed the parish, and these names represent the general feeling. A pretty fair muster, eh? Not many absent. I should like you just to run your eye over them and see for yourself the triumph which ritualism has achieved in this parish! The fruitful result of your labours.'

There was no further oiliness about Mr. Leary's manner. He had dropped his mask, and the real man appeared in all his beauty.

Father Philmore glanced at the signatures. Some of those whom he had counted as loyal supporters were amongst them.

'I flatter myself,' continued Mr. Leary, 'that when this goes up to the Bishop, you won't have a leg to

stand on! Can't say much for your personal popularity, Philmore. You seem to have rubbed them up the wrong way all along. Why, I hear that in your predecessor's time the church was crowded, and the people made more weeping and wailing over his departure than they'll ever make over yours, though he'd been here about as many months as you have been years!'

Father Philmore did not answer. He was reading the signatures mechanically. Mr. Leary touched the paper with a dramatic gesture.

'We, the undersigned,' he quoted in an unctuous voice, 'as loyal members of the Church of England, protest against the following practices, as contrary to the rubric in our Prayer-book, and the Thirty-nine Articles therein contained:

- (1) The worship of the Consecrated Elements.
- (2) The use of illegal Vestments.
- (3) The habitual practice of Auricular Confession.

We consider these practices conducive, respectively, to idolatry, vanity, and immorality.'

He moved to the door as he spoke, warned by the expression of Father Philmore's face that it would be more dignified for the warden not to be expelled from his vicar's house; but as he went he delivered his parting shaft.

'With regard to the last item,' he said, 'we cite as particularly unsuitable the hour of 2 A.M., and let me advise you next time you make an appointment

with the parish nurse, not to allow her to speak so loud.'

He turned on his heel then, but not before he had seen Father Philmore turn pale for the second time during the interview.

What had Mr. Leary heard, he wondered, of Nurse Evans' story? He was just the man to magnify and exaggerate a word or two to suit his own purpose of providing himself with a 'rod in pickle.' At any rate their secret was a secret no longer. Some part of it at least was in the unscrupulous hands of this man, who chiefly, it must be owned, through the vicar's injudicious treatment, had now added personal enmity to his religious differences.

Philmore told himself wearily that in such a series of mistakes as he had made from the very beginning, one more or less did not much matter. If it had not been for the principle of the thing, he would have been glad to resign; he was so tired of it all.

It is a moot point whether the true spirit of martyrdom lies in yielding obedience to a disagree-able order at the apparent cost of what we call principle, which is often nothing more nor less than our own way, or, as Father Philmore thought, in the opposite direction. From his point of view, to 'obey' was to 'sacrifice'; to sacrifice what to him were vital principles.

Every one must stand or fall by his own conscience in these matters. Just as a pleasure which

is expedient for one is harmful to another, so, in matters of principle, one man's meat is another man's poison. What would have been a minor point to a mind like Methuen's was to Philmore a matter of life or death, for which he would go, if required, to prison or to judgment, rightly or wrongfully, according to opinion.

Well, he guessed it must come to this long ago; the attempted fusion of uncongenial elements must result in an explosion. He had seen it brewing: he had known the actual disunion even among the most apparently united of his flock; the outward profession and the inward rottenness, and the absolute alienation of all from him.

He had held himself aloof in his pride, in his cold purity; proud of the knowledge that if he had failed to gain love he could at any rate command respect.

He had rested secure in the fact that no breath of shame could approach even remotely that lofty pinnacle where public opinion had placed him, as justice compels her sometimes to place those she dislikes.

Yes, Father Philmore, and those belonging to him, had always been above reproach in the eyes of men, and, as he was now discovering, in his own eyes also.

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CHAPTER XII

'WHISPERING TONGUES'

It is somewhat humiliating in these days of assumed feminine superiority to be obliged to own what a difference the male element makes in a house, but it is a fact which is forced by experience even upon the mind of the new woman. He may be one among a household of females, but their numbers are as nothing compared to his overwhelming personality.

A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump; the wife, or sister, or mother, as the case may be, takes her tone unconsciously from the man. She may be the biggest tyrant on record, and he the meekest male animal that ever called himself Lord of Creation: she may pull the strings behind the scenes; but he gives the dominant note to the household. Its arrangements model themselves upon his convenience; his moods must be studied at the expense, if necessary, of other people's. He is a personality before which each true daughter of Eve effaces herself, though she may not own it, and may loudly blame her sisters for so doing.

No woman in her heart cares for a household composed entirely of her own sex; if she pretends to, one may safely affirm that the grapes are sour. The same thing applies to men, but in a lesser degree, because no man need live alone, women of a certain sort being always to be had for the asking, and without.

It is true that each sex is dependent on the other for the refining influence which self-restraint imposes, but blink the fact as women will, the right of taking the initiative must confer a certain amount of power.

In the Learys' household the male element decidedly made itself felt, but it was a doubtful blessing, for Mr. Leary in a bad temper could have given points in objectionableness to any household of women. His wife generally fled before him on these occasions, but the sharp pertness of Doris was not easily abashed, and she usually started by making game of him, and when the house became unbearable, taking refuge in her district or with Nurse Evans till the storm blew over, and 'Richard was himself again.'

Poor Mrs. Leary thus entirely deserted, spent the time in tears, and prayers that either the Protestant cause might be finally victorious, or that she might not 'be there to see' its defeat.

She generally ascribed these upsets of her husband to some religious worry. The path of a reformer, she was always reminding herself, is beset with troubles unknown to private individuals, which must of course make him a little difficult to live with.

It was rather a noteworthy fact that Mr. Leary, although so little deserving of respect in most ways, possessed the invaluable quality of being able to keep his own counsel.

In his most expansive moments, he never revealed any of the secrets of the Protestant Union even to his wife. Letters went backwards and forwards on mysterious business, but she was quite in the dark as to what it might be, except for their visible effect on her husband's temper, to which he treated them with the most absolute unreserve. In fact, Mr. Leary was one of those dangerous men whose bite is much worse than their bark. One laughs at the bark, and does not know that it means mischief.

Judging by his temper, things seemed to have gone particularly askew since his visit to the vicar. Possibly the Bishop had not risen to the occasion, and done his duty as England expects every bishop to do, if he can discover what it is, with a 'Catholic' demanding one thing and a 'Protestant' the exact opposite! But in any case the waiting time while affairs were pending seemed to try Mr. Leary's temper pretty severely.

His interview with the vicar had leaked out as things will, and, garnished with sundry additions, chiefly by Mrs. Crouch, was going the round of the parish.

Mrs. Crouch had now taken the vicar entirely under her wing.

She was eminently conservative, and she still disapproved of the 'goings-on' at S. Sebastien's as she had done in Methuen's time, and spoke her mind with equal freedom. But to disapprove was one thing, and to act as Mr. Leary was doing, quite another in Mrs. Crouch's eyes.

She was loyal in her way. She would never cordially like the vicar, but for her word's sake, she had been true to him.

There was in her that mixed quality composed in equal parts of generosity and love of power that is always kindest to the weak.

When a person 'sung small' in any way, they could rely on Mrs. Crouch's kindness. That was the reason she and Mrs. Philmore got on so well; the latter was under her thumb, as people say.

Mrs. Crouch was a great stickler for 'living and letting live,' so, though she 'thanked the Lord' that she had got beyond such 'gimcracks' as ritual, and had her own opinion as to the intellect of the people who attached importance to them, if 'vicar liked to be a fool, 'twasn't nobody's business but the people who paid him for being one. Seems to me sometimes,' Mrs. Crouch added, 'that the Lord likes fools.'

Mrs. Crouch was rather in her element just now with Nurse Evans out of the way, and the vicar so

unusually meek that he actually allowed her to make beef-tea for him.

There was also a pleasurable sense of coming excitement in the air. Mrs. Crouch loved excitement, and things had been woefully flat of late. Nothing but 'births and buryings,' which are more or less everyday occurrences, as every one knows, though she always exaggerated them as much as possible by means of being very wise after the event.

Mrs. Crouch invariably heard a dog 'mourn' just as the arrival was expected, a sure and certain sign of the death of either mother or infant; and as she made a point of communicating these 'sure and certain signs' to the unfortunate woman, it was a wonder that so large a percentage of infants arrived safely upon the scene, and lived to bless the 'goodness and the grace' that had landed them on such 'Christian Days!'

As to 'buryings,' Mrs. Crouch simply loved them. Like most of her class, she preferred them to marryings or christenings, or even births. Whatever else she missed, Mrs. Crouch was always 'in at the death.' She liked to have a finger in the laying out of a 'nice corpse.' By which she meant a 'proper, decent, Christian corpse that you could respect'; and she would add, 'I ought to know, for I've seen a many lovely corpses in my day.' Then if any one wanted to propitiate Mrs. Crouch, they would encourage her to talk of her experiences in this line, and if it was

in these stirring times. She the trusted friend of the vica tried to persuade herself the champion of the vicar himse say, 'He that is not against a perpetual quotation of Scripts

have been related to Mr. Lewere usually misquotations.

Meantime that gentleman was unbearable. He forbade Dottien's in such a furious tone the to obey, and, bereft of the been the only object of her cence, she frittered her time school-girl sentiment over the strength of his misfortunes, forgive; and perpetual grum wonderings as to what was relieving her mind she had re-

naughty child indoors; but try as she might, Doris could not circumvent her father this time, or elude the vigilance of the Protestant Union, whose members came to the house after dark, and held secret meetings in the Learys' dining-room, thereby driving Doris and her mother to the shelter of their respective bedrooms.

Their common trouble did not draw the two together: there was no real sympathy between them. Doris was as trying as her father, without the extenuating circumstance of difference of sex, which covers a multitude of sins in a woman's eyes.

And to make matters worse, Nurse Evans was away. She was an absolute angel of mercy in the Learys' house, smoothing over rough places with her ready tact, and filling most successfully that difficult post of general adviser and sympathiser.

The Learys were all different, and all more or less at enmity with each other, and yet they all agreed in liking Beryl. Doris professed for her a passionate devotion, second only to that with which the vicar inspired her, while to poor Mrs. Leary she was a veritable godsend.

She possessed in perfection the 'heart at leisure from itself,' because her own life was far from empty. Her leisure did not therefore proceed from having no affairs of her own; it was just that she had left them, where she advised other people to leave theirs, in better Hands.

wisdom by which we must reordinary lives. Still, when recan be visibly united, there preaching is wonderfully help prefer the easier part. Nurse harder; she let the preaching. It is rare to find a person has a way as talarrant of athere.

It is rare to find a person her own so tolerant of other sideration for the 'bruised 1 Strong personal bias is gene prejudiced standpoint, and a fluence others in one's own d it was extraordinarily absent

Nurse Evans returned just suddenly as she came, and little intention of being comovements.

She went to the Learys' all Doris came flying into the 'How is your mother?' inquired Beryl.

'Oh, she's all right. Don't let her hear your voice, though, or she'll want you.'

Then, seated on her bed, Doris poured out her version of recent events; a version which certainly the chief actors would not have recognised, but which she had gathered from various sources, and garnished according to her own taste.

Beryl knit her brows in the effort to disentangle truth from fiction.

'And what would you do, dear Miss Evans—Beryl, I mean,' concluded Doris, 'if your father interfered with your spiritual privileges? Just think, I haven't been to my district for a week; and as to confession, it is not to be thought of.'

Beryl glanced at the golden head nestling against her shoulder, and thought to herself that Doris was of the type that brings female church-workers into such ill repute.

'What must Father Philmore be thinking?' continued Doris.

Beryl looked at her absently. She was wondering herself what he must be thinking, about many things, but the type of mind that regards everything with a view to itself was incomprehensible to her.

'Perhaps,' continued Doris, 'it is just as well to make a break with him. A variety even in confessors is charming, don't you think, sometimes?'

Beryl was silent. Fierce and unaccountable wrath

against Doris possessed her. She hated artificiality, yet, after all, the girl was not shamming; to be shallow and frivolous and conceited was natural to her. Nothing is sacred to a trival nature.

'What would you do, I wonder, dear Miss Evans,' pursued the shrill, girlish voice. 'In a case like mine, between duty to your respective fathers——' She brought the words out with a would-be shy air, and downcast eyes.

Beryl's patience was almost exhausted when a tired voice said behind them—'Miss Evans, do tell her that no blessing ever follows disobedience. Perhaps she will listen to you.'

Beryl Evans looked kindly at Mrs. Leary's harassed face, as she drew her down to sit beside her.

They seemed to have changed places. The faded, weary woman leant instinctively on the quiet strength which underlay the impulse and passion of Nurse Evans' character.

Her doubts rested on the girl's assurance of a personal God, with that blessed sense of relief that comes from contact with some one who is a living proof that religion has 'something in it.'

There are plenty of St. Thomases nowadays who want to 'see' that they may 'believe,' and for them, in these latter days, there is generally provided, as next best to having seen the Lord, some one who has walked with Him.

'Dear Mrs. Leary,' said Beryl, 'how tired you look! Come and sit down by me. If I had a mother, Doris, I don't think I could even want to disobey her. Don't pout and draw away, you silly child, but listen to me. Generally, as you know, I don't believe in discussing these subjects. Spiritual experiences are very easily vulgarised by talking them over among ourselves, and comparing notes; but as we are on the subject, it is only honest for me to say what confession has been to me, and that is, humanly speaking, my salvation.'

'But perhaps your case was exceptional,' said Mrs. Leary. 'Forgive me, dear Miss Evans, but I cannot imagine you an ordinary girl. Don't you think that, generally speaking, injudicious questions are asked which upset the happiness of a home? It seems to me so destructive of the natural confidence between child and parent that I cannot approve of it, though I would never forbid a child of mine to go if she honestly thought it right.'

She sighed as she spoke and glanced at Doris, who sat in sulky silence. The thought was in Beryl's mind that those who, by their abuse of good things, cause the enemy to blaspheme, are responsible for a great deal.

'You are judging by what you have heard,' she said gently, 'and by your preconceived ideas. Once get into your mind that confession, rightly used, brings into a life the beauty of holiness, and you will

not need to ask whether it upsets the happiness of a home.'

'But you don't surely believe in compulsory confession?' persisted Mrs. Leary, sticking to her point with the obstinacy of a very gentle person.

Beryl smiled. 'I cannot imagine such a word in connection with one's greatest privilege,' she said.

'It's a pity you don't choose a less scandalous time for your greatest privilege,' said the familiar voice of protestant indignation from the door. 'Anyhow, I'll thank you to remember that my house is neither a penitentiary nor a confessional-box, and not to sneak into it, and teach my daughter to deceive me. As we have no "priests" here, I wonder you consider the game worth the candle.'

Mr. Leary's parental feelings overcame him at this point, and he shook his fist at Doris, who shrank nearer to Beryl for protection. 'I advise you not to try it on with me,' he said. 'Beside, your little game is no go. Your piety hasn't salted the bird's tail, so you may as well drop it. Your vicar has other fish to fry,' pointing at Beryl. 'What are the innocent wiles of a little fool like you, compared with the schemes of an adventuress—a woman with a past?'

He paused. It was a strange scene. Mr. Leary had not advanced into the room, being the sort of man who prefers aiming his shafts from a safe distance.

They only knew him from his voice, the loud

tones of which were sadly familiar to his wife. Perhaps it was the amount of talking which these Protestant meetings involved that made him so excited after them.

The light of a solitary candle on a chair by Doris' bed fell on her face and Beryl's. Mrs. Leary was more in shadow.

Doris had shrunk away from Beryl at her father's words, and now stood aloof with an assumed air of virtue.

Her pretended affection for her friend could not stand the test which proves fatal to so many more securely founded female friendships.

Beryl was not surprised. She had gauged Doris pretty correctly, but she felt an added twinge of contempt for the petty spite and contemptible jealousy that condemned without a hearing.

She herself was stunned for the moment by Mr. Leary's words. The descent from the 'mountain top' was so sudden and complete. Then, in a sort of blind rage which came over her on very rare occasions and recalled her passionate childhood, she made for the door.

What she had meant to do exactly she never knew, for at that moment a thud came on the floor; Mrs. Leary had fainted.

Beryl glanced round. Doris had escaped with her father. She could not very well leave Mrs. Leary alone. Humane and professional instincts alike

forbade it, so, trembling still with excitement, she stooped somewhat unwillingly over her and applied some simple remedies, not particularly blessing the patient for detaining her in a house which every instinct told her she ought to have quitted.

Presently the heavy eyes opened.

'Beryl,' said Mrs. Leary faintly, 'this is no place for you. Go before he sees you. We must bear our troubles alone. And, Beryl,' she said pleadingly, 'try to forgive him. Remember we expect so much from you.'

The words were not consciously satirical, but Beryl smiled sadly to herself, as she stole like a thief in the night from the house which she had so often entered with the freedom of a familiar friend, and from which she had been virtually expelled.

She walked home with her heart unusually heavy. Things looked very dark just now, even to her, and she had not the heart to smile at the children who, as usual, beset her path.

Her changed attitude with the vicar clouded her whole outlook.

It was a question, she thought, how long she could remain at the Cottage Home unless matters improved.

Her present position in the parish was not particularly pleasant. This was the second house closed to her. The parsonage she had resolved of her own accord to avoid. The changed footing on which she stood with Father Philmore would make their relations strained and uncomfortable. If he misunderstood her absence, she could not help it.

She had reached this point in her meditations, when the sound of hurrying footsteps behind her made her turn round.

'My dear,' panted little Mrs. Philmore, 'I have been running after you. You are the very person I wanted. Why did you come home and not let us know?'

'I have not been home long,' said Beryl evasively.

Mrs. Philmore looked at her. She thought she had lighted on a romance, and was somewhat disappointed at the falling off which she fancied she had observed lately in one, if not both, of the parties concerned.

Of course, she argued, Francis was so uncommon that one could not judge him by general rules. With an ordinary individual the attention which he had shown to Nurse Evans would have meant nothing but the usual civility of a man to a woman; but Father Philmore was not usually civil to women, as his own mother could testify. Then Beryl, too, was decidedly out of the common. Mrs. Philmore had always been somewhat in awe of her; but to-day she looked meeker, and so sad and pale, that the little lady played what she thought a very compelling card.

in a studiously cold tone, 'Is.

'Yes, he is far from well, a manageable. I can do nothin you persuade him, dear Miss fit to take the service to-more You could speak with authorit 'Has he asked for me?' said 'Well, not exactly. You k any one; but, as the parish n

go.'

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Ph
officious people, had put hersel

Far from having asked for I
guessing his mother's intentio
that he would rather not see I
guessed from the little lady's fl
'Thank you,' she said coldly.
take advantage of my official c
ing. Mrs. Philmore.' She went

It was evident that the vicar intended her absence to be a break in their intercourse. He did not wish to resume it on the old footing. Apparently, after the communication which she had felt in duty bound to make to him, he could not regard her in the same light, and, although she felt it hard, Beryl could not wonder.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MIDNIGHT MASS OF CHRISTMAS

YEAR after year, with a monotony that never palls, the old story of Christmas is repeated. People may turn a deaf ear to its message, but they have generally an appreciative palate for its good cheer!

We all keep Christmas whether we believe in Christ or not, but as to its meaning, most of us leave that to the clergy.

We have enough to do in getting our presents, and arranging our home parties, and laying in our provisions, and generally preparing to observe it in our different ways. Harmless ways most of them, involving a considerable benefit to trade and the family physician, and a certain amount of indiscriminate charity which costs us very little. Still the popular way of keeping Christmas is not at all a bad one for the natural man; when we come to the Christian, it is another matter. We expect of him, and justly, that supernatural spirit of charity which embraces not only our friends but our enemies, and which loves our neighbour as ourself, and therefore exceedingly.

Father Philmore was seeking for it in himself and

his people, almost with despair, for he knew of no act of ritual that would teach it, and yet without it all their doings were 'as nothing.' The tinkling cymbal of mere outward observance rang sadly in his ears this Christmas; they were all so out of tune with the festival of peace, that the semblance of rejoicing which custom demanded seemed almost a mockery.

He was having a midnight mass on Christmas Eve, against the advice of many who thought it a dangerous time to introduce innovations, but their counsels of prudence fell, as usual, on deaf ears. He had longed for this midnight mass, and in the present precarious state of S. Sebastien's, he felt that it was now or never. The clouds were gathering fast; the future was most uncertain; and it seemed such a chance to pray for peace—to hold a special service of intercession for the sins of himself and his people. He had asked them to join their prayers with his that the Christmas Guest whom they had assembled to honour might grant His peace to their most unhappy parish, groaning and travailing under its many divisions.

The church was packed; the novelty of the service, and the sense of impending crisis which surrounded S. Sebastien's just then, attracted people outside the ordinary congregation.

Willing hands had dressed the church in her festive garb. There is a strange quality in the



tions at S. Sebastien's nov in view of the fact that it n and all had united to dress mas best, discussing her at worked themselves up to a devotion that was purely brought them to church in expectancy which spreads concourse.

The service was a novel gregation. They did not coming, and were all on the the hour; the darkness of t of the vicar in having such selves for attending it, all c their feelings.

A midnight mass; why, citing! And they shivered p would begin, in audible whis

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masses of red and white flowers. The long, winding procession, headed by its flashing cross, pacing slowly round the dim church; the red cassocks of the acolytes, and the rich embroidery of the banners, making a bright spot of colour; and the voices of the vast, closely packed multitude mingling in the Christmas hymns, to the weird accompaniment of the clanking censer chains, and slowly mounting incense-fumes, as the thurifer censed the people.

Father Philmore was the celebrant, and it seemed to his mother as he passed her in the procession that he had cast aside the invalidism which had made her so unwilling for him to take this service. He walked erect as seeing 'Him who is invisible.'

To a believer in the Real Presence, life is immensely simplified. He can seek the Lord with certainty where his faith tells him that He is to be found. Some one had once compared Methuen and Philmore to Esau and Jacob. The one a popular man of the world, with every natural advantage; the other a disagreeable character for all his saintliness, but indisputably a man after God's own heart. An aroma of holiness, strange as it was indescribable, had always seemed to surround Father Philmore. There was something about him which riveted the attention without drawing the heart, which commanded respect without in the least compelling affection. But to-night his heart seemed to yearn over his people. He was more in union with them

about a very familiar figure strange to miss him from He seemed so very near her a little of it down to then watched him that it was goo. At the words 'Thou shalt graven image,' an audible g idolatry in the Church of fingers pointed at the crucifi pulpit.

Doris was in church, crot

Doris was in church, crou thrilling with disobedience scious that every time she co round of 'Go to Rome,' wh feeling of heroism, while it comparatively easy to be a while one is perfectly safe a seat! Even there Doris w father, whom she trusted

the latter at the bottom of the church with an elderly man. A passing glance was, however, all that she condescended to bestow upon such an improper person as the nurse. 'People who do church-work,' as she had told a certain dear friend, who did not do church-work, and was all the dearer on that account, 'have to be so very careful as to their associates because of the example to others.' However, in spite of the example, Doris found it very hard to-night to fix her attention on the familiar words of the service, with so much of interest to the initiated, going on around her. She found her mind wandering from the low, monotonous voice of the celebrant to the distant, ever-swelling murmur which, like the angry waves of an incoming storm tide, seemed to get nearer and nearer to the front of the church. It broke out afresh as the gospeler kissed the Bible on its magnificent cushion; and when the elements were raised in oblation, a distinct hiss was heard from the back of the church, quelled instantly by some one.

In the hush which followed, the words of supplication from the bowed form by the altar could almost be heard as he bore his own sins and his people's on the wings of intercession. 'Kyrie Eleison, Christi Eleison,' pleaded the moving lips. 'Have mercy on our hardness of heart; our want of charity; on the unhappy divisions in the Church which should be one.'

taking possession of the t with it; or was it the mohimself at the bitter irony are backward driven,' when ward to the very front ranks into the Holy of Holies.

People said that the vicar

a note of mockery, as it so

narrow-mindedness had alice likely. He took the blam 'that we may be forgiven,' been a round stick in a squa 'And after we have strivestriven against his youthful duty, his dreary duty, day thard, as He alone knew why win souls to Christ; failed a parish priest. He though

would win heaven, he was no

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He had tried and failed. He could not change himself, but it seemed to him that he had done all else.

'In love and charity with your neighbours'; of what congregation could that be said truly? Certainly not of his people, certainly not of him! He thought of his own relations with Mr. Leary and shuddered, bowing his head low on his breast at the general confession. As he faced the people to pronounce the absolution, and they bowed their heads and crossed themselves as usual, he was distinctly conscious of a commotion at the bottom of the church, and the words 'No priest between our souls and God; down with him,' accompanied by a sort of onward rush. But when he faced the altar he became again unconscious of his surroundings.



THE supreme moment was a were telling the Christmas after year with unfailing pa not. Each Christmas the humility falls athwart man' goodwill and peace, throws in spite and bickering. The t which had lain for so long became on this night an a practical end, that the worlthe world, on the whole, prefer

Father Philmore thought and blind' who prepared fo and a cross, must be expecte and insult his priests. The world still be



Not to hear the oft-repeated tale of Christmas—they were tired of that—but to see a strange, new sight, a pageant like the Lord Mayor's Show, of brave dresses, and bright colours. So much for them. What of himself? He had mourned over their neglect of the things which belonged to their peace, but had he found them in those outward observances for which he was prepared to sacrifice everything? He cast his thoughts back, and, before the Searcher of all hearts, reviewed his life. It is so hard to be absolutely true, that even with the God whom we cannot deceive, we are tempted to extenuate, to make excuses which would probably be made for us if we were not so ready to invent them for ourselves! Father Philmore did not err in this direction. had been hard, bitter, and unmerciful to others, but he was harder, and bitterer, and more unmerciful to himself. Scathingly he reviewed his faulty life in the light of the Divine Presence. He had been so absurdly lofty; aimed at nothing less than perfection, and fallen short of everything. His life had been an irony on his own words, grand, sounding, empty words, spoken in the ignorance and egotism of youth: 'You cannot have a Christian religion with the Cross taken out of it.'

How had he treated the Cross when it came into his own life? He had rebelled. He had wanted happiness, and because he had missed it, he had visited the fact on his fellow-men in fierce, unreasoning

rage. For the sake of the idol which he had made, and which God had taken from him, his love had turned to gall, and his heart to stone. 'You pride yourself, do you not, on living the sacramental Ah, never had words cut deeper, or come nearer to the heart of a matter than those. He had thought them cruel, and so they were; truth is generally cruel! 'But it seems to me that you have very little to show for it.' Yes, woefully little; nothing, in fact! Not one sheaf gathered by his labours: not one heart gained by his love. And he had longed for the love of his people, not only for their souls. He knew it now, longed for it with the gnawing heart-hunger of the unloved, with the yearning for popularity of the unpopular, and seen what he craved given without the asking to those who had already full measure and running over, and because of this he had grown hard and bitter. It was natural, but he was called to something over and above nature; to follow Christ by Christ's own way. After all, who was he to condemn the friend who had turned his back on the thorny path because it was too hard, when he who had remained in it grumbled when the thorns hurt him? Who was he to decry worldliness in others; the pursuit of riches, fame, anything that the world holds dear, when he himself had laboured for the meat that perisheth in the shape of an idol of flesh and blood?

What were those shouts coming nearer and nearer?

They were calling him an idol-worshipper. Well, it was true, he had worshipped many gods. He had longed for popularity, but it had not come at his call, so he had gloried instead in his character for saintliness in that immunity from the sins of flesh and blood, which nature and grace had for once united in giving him. He had worshipped the spotless reputation of himself and his family, and now even that had been taken from him by the hands of the only woman whom he had ever respected. He had nothing to offer now but his poor broken life of failure, and his contrite heart!

The glad, triumphant song burst from the lips of the choir. 'Hosanna, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.' Yes, He was coming, as He came long ago, to believing and unbelieving alike. To that huge congregation of lip-worshippers with their ready hosannas; to the scoffers and mockers who crucified Him afresh; to the bent form by the altar, dedicating his life anew; offering his failures; trying to gather up the dropped threads of his disjoined life, He was coming with life or damnation.

The sanctus bell announced His approach, and at the sound a groan went up from the back of the church, accompanied by a general forward movement. The thrill which the moment of consecration does not always bring, because even in sacred things familiarity breeds contempt, permeated that huge congregation. They all felt that a crisis of some sort was approaching; this was no ordinary function at which they were assisting. The supplicating attitude of the celebrant showed that for him great issues were at stake. Also every one in the church was conscious by this time of a commotion at the back, and of a tendency on the part of a certain group headed by Mr. Leary to push forward to the front, which tendency was carefully watched by the elderly man with Nurse Evans, who sedulously followed the movements of Mr. Leary and his satellites, and whose appearance seemed to create almost as much sensation as Mr. Leary's conduct. People turned to stare at him again and again. Whispers and nudges went round, and John Crouch was startled quite out of his usual condition of the stolid functionary by the appearance of this ordinary-looking individual. Strangers who were present saw pretty plainly that something of special importance to the parish was Mr. Leary sat each time behind his happening. satellites, and, although not taking any active part himself, was evidently inciting them to interrupt the service at various parts.

As the sanctus bell rang there was a general rush forward, accompanied by shouts of 'The Elevation of the Host,' and Nurse Evans' companion moved steadily forward to the chancel rails, taking her with him. As Father Philmore approached with the

sacred elements held reverently on high, a roar arose of 'No wafer bread.' He heard it, but it fell more or less on deaf ears. They had often refused the Bread of Life before. He came forward, stepping reverently as one who bore his Lord, and his face shone with the inward peace of a mind that has emptied itself, for the time being, of all earthly desire. . . .

He did not expect many communicants. There had been a request that all communicating at the midnight mass would send in their names, and not many had done so. He was conscious of a rush to the altar rails and a voice crying, 'You look very saintly, but what about two o'clock in the morning? May the Lord defend us from idolaters!' With a word to Nurse Evans, her companion stepped forward to the chancel rails, said a few sharp words to the disturbers, which apparently changed their intention of approaching the altar, for they turned and went back to their seats.

In that brief pause, while the celebrant faced the people, his eyes met those of his defender, and he saw, as in a dream, the man who had haunted his life; who had left the Church, taking with him the hearts of many. There was no mistaking the kind, quizzical face; the powerful hands which had saved the sacred mysteries from the grasp of the destroyer. Surely that thought should have been uppermost in the mind of the celebrant. It was only for a moment that the well-remembered face flashed upon his

bewildered sight, but in that moment the work and prayers of years were all undone.

The hands which held the sacred elements shook visibly, and the lips which no taunts had disturbed from their lines of enforced quiescence, quivered like the lips of a little child. The calm of the whole face broke up. Nature asserted herself, and like a pent-up torrent, his heart went out with a rush of welcome to the idol of his life. It was all the work of a moment, then, with hesitating steps, but apparently unmoved, the celebrant again faced the altar and concluded the service from force of habit. . . .

'May the Lord defend us from idolaters.' The words rang in his ears, and he shuddered. Yes, he thought, it was true; he was an idolater: they were right to hoot him; Methuen should not have stopped them. He, too, had mocked God, and not in ignorance, like that jeering, hooting crowd, but in all the fulness of knowledge, with its accompanying responsibility. He had worshipped all his life, not a crucifix, not the sacrifice of the mass—they were wrong there—but a mortal man!

CHAPTER XV

'AFTER MANY DAYS'

WHEN the service was over, Methuen, after seeing that the congregation was dispersing quietly, prepared to follow their example as quickly as possible. He wanted to escape unobserved, and perceiving John Crouch bearing down upon him, knew that in another moment he would be generally recognised and flight impossible. It was so very late, that for every one's sake it would be better for him to go home quietly to-night without any fresh disturbances such as a public recognition would be bound to cause. He looked round for Nurse Evans, but she had disappeared. It was possible, Methuen thought, that she had been sent for to the vicar.

As he stood outside the church, keeping a sharp look-out for her and for John Crouch, with a view to appropriating the one and avoiding the other, Mr. Leary detached himself from an excited group of which he was the centre and came towards him. There was something apologetic and uncertain in his manner. He was not quite sure what position to assume with Methuen, not knowing exactly how

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much right the latter had to interfere. That the quelling of the disturbance was mainly due to him. Leary was perfectly aware, but he could not very well resent this fact without posing as its instigator, a rôle which did not suit his present purpose. had kept in the background all the evening, only inciting his followers without committing himself to anything which he might regret afterwards. Also, he recognised his master in Methuen. might get the better of Philmore, but he had no hold over this keen man of the world who took his measure at a glance. He was very anxious also to ascertain what Methuen's former connection with the parish had been, so he hazarded a remark to the effect that the state of affairs in this unhappy church was very regrettable. Methuen looked him over coolly without replying.

'Perhaps you knew it in happier days?' continued Mr. Leary.

'Well, yes, slightly,' was the smiling reply. 'May I ask what your connection is?'

Mr. Leary was beginning to breathe again, and as a natural result his native pomposity returned.

'Certainly, sir, certainly: you see before you the people's warden.'

'Indeed, you surprise me,' said Methuen; 'I imagined that the office of a warden was to quell disorder, not to excite it. My ignorance, no doubt.'

Mr. Leary was quite happy now that he was

allowed to hear his own voice. 'Your Christian humility, my dear sir, is admirable,' he said. 'No doubt, as you say, you don't understand these little church differences. A point of conscience with me, I assure you! I, you see, am the vox populi, bound to represent the people.'

'Or to let them represent you,' said Methuen. 'It seemed to me to-night that they were bearing all the brunt, while you, who were at the bottom of the whole disturbance, kept neatly out of it.'

'Sir, I will pardon your offensive language in consideration of your avowed ignorance, which I will endeavour to enlighten. You have witnessed to-night the attempted cleansing of the temple, and may the Lord forgive you for hindering it.'

Methuen was waxing impatient. If he had not been waiting for Nurse Evans, he would long ago have cut short Mr. Leary's eloquence. As it was, he fumed inwardly, and wished that she would come.

'It is not only advanced ritual, sir, of which the aggrieved parishioners complain. There are various indiscretions in the vicar's conduct with the parish nurse. But here comes the lady.'

Methuen's face brightened perceptibly as Beryl Evans came towards them, and he made a quick step forward to meet her, and drew her hand through his arm. Then he turned to Mr. Leary.

'I will trouble you in future,' he said very dis-

tinctly, 'to speak more respectfully of my affianced wife.'

Mr. Leary, though inwardly breathless with astonishment, was not to be nonplussed. 'Then let me advise you in future,' he said, repeating Methuen's words with just a shade of insolence, 'to look more carefully after your affianced wife. She's just a shade too fond of vicars for an engaged young lady. Everything in moderation, you know, even religion, Mr.—— I don't know your name.'

'That is a pleasure which you will soon enjoy,' said Methuen slowly, with a look under which Leary's coward heart would have quailed, if he could have seen it. 'I intend, Mr. Leary, that we shall meet again, when, as former vicar of this parish, I shall hope to return your kind information of to-night by enlightening your ignorance on various points.'

Then he went off at a rapid pace, taking Beryl with him, and leaving his adversary in a condition which Mrs. Crouch would have described as 'struck of a heap!'

Methuen laughed a little to himself over Mr. Leary's words, as he looked down in the darkness at his silent companion.

'I can't see you,' he said, 'but why are you trembling?' Then, after a pause—'He was right; too much religion hasn't agreed with you. It was evidently time I came.'

She did not answer, but tightened her hold on

his arm, as if to make sure of its protection, and hurried on, almost dragging him with her. At the door of her lodgings he paused and looked down at her, with a searching expression that tried to pierce the darkness.

'It is very late,' he said, 'but must I go, my little maid?' . . .

Yes, his little maid; admitted by him into the Catholic Church, and his own life at the same time. Seen again, when her embryo passions and budding beauty, her mixture of ignorance and knowledge, had been a considerable temptation in his loneliness, and one from which only the child's almost involuntary sense of duty had preserved him. From the evil, which she knew too well, she looked to him for protection, and he had not failed her, though the appeal came at his most abandoned period.

The quality of response to trust, which Methuen possessed in unusually large proportion, is not so wholly noble as people imagine, for trust flatters our self-esteem as much as popularity. Elfrida was probably the only human being who had absolute confidence in Methuen just then, and her faith was precious with the value of a unique possession, which once lost can never be regained.

To destroy it by turning tempter, would have been out of keeping with his whole character, for even stronger than his passions was his love of popular approbation.

Unlike Philmore, he could blind his own conscience by sophistry, but he knew that he could not blind Elfrida. He had grasped the wonderful, though undeveloped moral rectitude which underlay her ignorance; the longing for virtue, only waiting to know what virtue was. Once lose his power for good over Elfrida, and he would have no power at all. Also at this stage of Methuen's existence, when people ceased to believe in him they ceased to interest him. Philmore's approbation was, he believed, lost to him for ever, therefore Philmore himself had been discarded as no longer affording pleasure. Elfrida must be kept even at the cost of bridling the passions which his critical and analytical side always kept more or less in check.

After all, the love of popularity is not a bad motive when no higher one is forthcoming. Methuen had nothing in those days to keep him straight but his sense of artistic fitness, but it answered the same purpose in the end as Father Philmore's conscience; it made him rise to Elfrida's ideal, and play the rôle of saviour instead of tempter. Since then, their positions had been rather reversed. The thought of Elfrida learning her duty for his sake in her Catholic Home had helped him to do the hard things which nature had made so much more difficult for him than for her. The Sister had kept him informed from time to time of the girl's whereabouts, and it was at his suggestion that she had been trained as a nurse,

and sent to work at S. Sebastien's under Father Philmore. There was something which satisfied Methuen's idea of poetical justice in Elfrida's return as a full-pledged Catholic to the church whose mysteries had puzzled her childish brain. 'The young mind' had certainly, in this case, 'caught the strain' of the 'heavenly notes' with wonderful aptitude. As she crossed the threshold of S. Sebastien, Elfrida had received her moral baptism; from that moment her childish feet had started, almost unknowingly, on that difficult and disagreeable path of duty, the first steps of which are trodden gaily by so many, and the end arrived at by so few!

In his wandering life, Methuen liked to think of his protégée amid the old associations. In fact, he was back there himself as he followed Elfrida in imagination, from step to step, smelling the peculiar odour of new wood in the recently finished church, and the fragrance of the altar flowers which had afforded such unbounded satisfaction to a certain small person with a roguish face and saucy dark eyes, and watching the awe and reverence of the Holy Mysteries stealing over the baby-face.

Their positions were reversed now in many ways. At the present moment he was asking her for admittance as he stood at the door of her lodgings. Something in her face seemed to answer him, for he took the key from her icy-cold fingers, and, opening the door, followed her in without further

parley. The remains of a fire still smouldered in the little grate, and she stooped over the dying embers, putting them together, to keep her face hidden from him.

When we have waited for the desire of our hearts for very long, the shock of its unexpected arrival overpowers all else. We do not know at first whether we are glad or sorry; we only feel disarranged in our minds, which had resigned themselves to a long course of waiting.

One cannot desire a thing for ever, and we outlive our wishes as we outgrow our youth. If it had only come a little sooner we cry, before our love had grown so cold or our critical faculty so strong that we see every little imperfection with such painful clearness. Before we had become so in love with imagination that we prefer it to reality!

This was not Elfrida's case. She had kept the thought of Methuen always before her, knowing that she was drifting towards him as a stream towards the sea; that eventually by every law of nature her life must merge into his, only she had not expected that it would be quite so soon, and she dared not let herself go to-night; dared not give way to the flood of memories which knocked for admission at the door of her heart; dared not realise that the 'Fairy Prince' had really come, and the world was metamorphosed.

Nothing but commonplaces came to her lips as she stooped over the fire.

'I am often as late as this with patients,' she said, 'so I send the old woman to bed and let myself in.'

Methuen took the tongs from her and made the fire up with a few sharp, decisive strokes, and the air of one who is used to doing things for himself. Then he beckoned Elfrida peremptorily to a chair. She obeyed, smiling. There was no need now to assert her independence; no need to fight any more the weary battle of a single-handed woman against a cruel world; her future rôle was to obey.

Methuen stood leaning against the mantelpiece, looking down at her with the calm air of assured possession. She belonged to him for ever, so there was no hurry. He could observe every point at his leisure.

'You are very pale and worn, Elfrida,' he said.

Yes, and she was very weak. She was always weak in his presence, and the strain of the past few months had been greater than she knew.

'I could not help writing,' she said, almost apologetically; 'no one but you could set things straight, and the position was becoming unendurable for both of us, so I acted on my own responsibility. You heard that man to-night.'

Methuen smiled at her, and for the first time their eyes met.

'You did quite right,' he said gravely. 'But I

don't quite understand. Why doesn't he know your real relation to Philmore?'

Elfrida blushed painfully.

'I haven't seen the vicar since that night in church,' she said, in a low voice; 'and I don't know what he wishes, or who he has told. I am sure his mother doesn't know.'

'Then how has this creature, this Leary, found out?'

'He saw us in church,' said Elfrida.

'And heard?'

'Yes, so he says.'

Methuen considered. 'I should say he knew nothing, really,' he said after a moment. 'He is only trying to frighten you, and create a sensation by what he saw. There is no cause for scandal, you know, in the absolute facts.'

He paused, and seemed to be thinking, then he said suddenly—

'Elfrida, how Philmore has changed! I should not have known him. It seems so strange that he, living such a sheltered life, should have grown into an older man than I, who through all my wanderings have kept my boy's heart in spite of my grey head. And to think that I called him "the Infant!"'

Elfrida thought to herself that there was just the difference between the two of a full man and a fasting. It is easy to starve in the midst of plenty if the plenty is not of the sort which commends itself to our special requirements.

'And I honestly thought,' continued Methuen, 'that I was putting the right man in the right place for once—doing a good turn for him and for every one else, but there seems to have been a mistake somewhere; and yet, if ever a man deserved to find peace, it is good old Philmore. Why does he look as if you had been starving him among you? Come, little witch, you are good at unearthing mysteries; sit here by me and tell me where the fault lies. Who should know the affairs of the parish if not the parish nurse?'

Elfrida, as she looked at him, felt an added glow of appreciation for Philmore, because he had loved this hero of hers. And also loved and lost, while she had loved and won.

'I think,' she said softly, 'that "the King has killed his heart." Why did you never write to him all these years? It is not like you.'

'Child, what was the use when the one thing which he longed to hear I could not tell him? I was no nearer being a Catholic from his point of view than when I left him, and nothing else would have satisfied him.'

Elfrida was not so sure. Her keen woman's instinct grasped the fact that it was not over Methuen's lack of ritual alone that Philmore had been grieving all these years. But she only said, 'You can satisfy him now.'

Yes, by devious paths these two were arriving at

Both had mocked God in their the same goal. different ways. The one, after draining the cup of pleasure and finding it gall, had turned to something more satisfying to his inner thirst; sickened of selfpleasing, he had returned to purity through the love of a little child. The other had walked perforce on the path of duty, but grudgingly, offering to God the kernel of outward observance with a heart full of After all, love in its higher or lower form rules everything in heaven and earth, and they had both discovered it, the one by its gain, the other by its loss. Only the higher form is called religion which is love to God, and the lower human affection which is love to man. Methuen had obtained the first chiefly through the second. After many backslidings known only to Elfrida, he could say, 'I believe.'

The unbelief would be always there. It was not in his sceptical nature to attain Elfrida's faith or Philmore's spirituality, but we are not expected, luckily, to change our temperaments. We may aim after some one else's, but we shall probably only attain great things through the controlling and proper developing of our own. We must be ourselves. And after all, the prodigal sons have a joy of their own which the 'elder brothers' cannot share. The pardoned sinners and the 'lost sheep' love most and repent best, which is rather hard on the 'just persons.' Methuen, for instance,

after experiencing the joy of living, had tasted the yet deeper joy of repenting. Philmore had known neither the one nor the other. Indeed he could hardly be said to have lived at all, and the overflowing love of the pardoned soul had never once warmed the chill formality of his religion. gone through his perfunctory duties day by day and year by year, dead to things earthly and heavenly too; treading the grey, level road of the path we call duty, for want of a better name, but which generally means that there is no love in it, for when duty and love go hand in hand, the former ceases to be irksome. In some cases we walk on the appointed path for the simple reason that we must; forgetting that it is hardly flattering to God to do our duty because we can't help it.

Methuen took the small, strong hands that had led him all his life in his own, with a thrill of pity for the lonely man who loved him.

'I expect you are right as usual, my little maid,' he said gently. 'And to think I never knew it! And yet I did, in a way. Poor Philmore, poor lad! There was never any one who loved me quite like the "Infant!" Don't take your hands away, darling.'

Elfrida looked at him. 'I think,' she said slowly, 'that I am jealous.'

CHAPTER XVI

'THE SINS OF THE FATHERS'

'THEN I stand you out, John Crouch, that I'm not crying! With him come back as faskinating as ever, and sitting upstairs with vicar as innocent as a wolf in sheep's clothing, what have I got to cry for, I'd like to know?'

As she spoke, Mrs. Crouch vigorously winked away a suspicious-looking drop from the corner of her eye.

'That's just what I want to know,' said her better half, who seemed to be in an unusually aggravating mood. 'Though folks do say that women always cry when they ought to do the other thing.'

'Some women,' said Mrs. Crouch contemptuously, 'not me. Didn't I always say, "Cast thy bread upon the waters"?'

'I wish you'd get my bread out of the cupboard,' interrupted her husband. 'You've forgotten it.'

'Really, John, you're enough to try the patience of a saint to-day.'

'Which you never were, my dear! But never mind; you're a respectable woman, and that's something.'

Mrs. Crouch put the bread down and stared at her husband.

'You've something on your mind, John Crouch,' she said; 'out with it. More old wives' tales, I'll be bound! I'd back a man any day for listening to gossip. Not but what it's in the air here. Even I can't keep clear of it; though if there is a thing I hate and loathe like poison, it's gossip.'

John, with a vivid memory that every particularly spicy tale in the parish had originated with his wife, grinned to himself at this barefaced statement, but he did not contradict her, for when a person carries either untruthfulness or bad temper beyond a certain limit, it is useless to reason: one is obliged to regard them as more or less insane. Added to which fact John was keen on his subject just now.

- 'It's about Nurse Evans,' he said gravely.
- 'Oh, I know all about that,' said Mrs. Crouch loftily. 'Vicar told me as how they'd been keeping company for years. No accounting for some men's tastes.'
- 'Ay, wife, and do you remember a certain little maid in a red frock who came into this very kitchen years ago?'
- 'I should rather think I did,' said Mrs. Crouch with asperity, 'and if that's all you've got to say, John Crouch, you may as well eat your tea and stop your mouth. A forward hussy she always was, and always will be. I never could abear her, and never

shall.' Which John Crouch, knowing something of the mind feminine, thought highly probable.

'Then I advise you to keep your opinion to yourself, wife,' he said.

'Oh, I know vicar's fair crazed about her. There's no fool like an old man's darling, as the Bible says.'

John was so used to his wife's jumbles of what she called Scripture that they had ceased to amuse him. In fact, when he heard the right version from any one, he felt inclined to correct them.

There had been a time when he used to wonder which was the Bible and which wasn't, and occasionally to hunt the matter up on going to bed, but that was long ago when he was young and active, and of an inquiring mind. Now, he was quite content to accept his wife's version. It saved trouble; indeed he sometimes wondered whether, as she gave him so much of the Bible, he might not be let off his own private reading altogether!

'Both vicars are fair crazed over you girl,' said John grimly.

'Both vicars, man! There's only one vicar, worse luck!'

Mrs. Crouch dropped her voice over the last statement in case Mrs. Philmore was anywhere within hearing.

'They both lay claim to her, anyway,' chuckled John.

'John Crouch, I'm ashamed of you; a man in the church, and listening to the idle tales that have been a disgrace to a Christian parish! Not but what I believe if Peter himself came down from purgatory, or wherever he is, poor soul, the people in this parish would marry him to some one! But as to you, John, I'm surprised, for if ever a man was a saint unborn——'

'It's me, my dear, were you going to say?'

'You, indeed! Likely I'd cocker up any man like that, least of all you! But this I do say, that if ever a man has mortified the devil, and said get thee behind me to women, it's our vicar, for of such is the kingdom of heaven, and you know it, John.'

John thought to himself that if the kingdom of heaven was composed entirely of the fair sex, as his wife's words implied, though she meant something else as usual, it might, on the whole, be rather a good thing for the men. Being an old-fashioned husband, he could not hope for a change of society in this world, and it was rather refreshing to look forward to it in the next! He only remarked, however, that his wife seemed to have changed her mind on the subject of the vicar.

'Then you're out there, John, for it's a thing I never do. When I says a thing, I sticks to it like corn-plaster. I didn't like vicar, and I don't like vicar, and I shan't never like vicar, so there! What do you say? I don't care who hears me. It's gospel truth. But that's not saying that he isn't

good. Any one but a fool would know that good people can be mighty disagreeable.'

In stating which fact, Mrs. Crouch went wonderfully near the truth for her, and her husband, watching her, wondered if she could by any chance be good. It had never occurred to him before, but it might account for a great deal.

'It stands to reason,' pursued Mrs. Crouch, 'when you bottle up a thing in one way, it'll break out in another. Badness is like my decayed tooth that burst right through my cheek when the dentist stopped it. Must have a vent somehow. And these kind of saints are reg'lar right-down spiteful sometimes, 'cause they can't do nothing else. Take it out in vendable sins, don't you see?'

'What on earth are they?' said the puzzled John, wondering whether they had anything to do with the sale of indulgences.

'Sins that are not immortal,' said Mrs. Crouch sententiously. 'That don't kill you,' she added, condescending to simpler language for the benefit of the inferior male mind of her uninstructed husband. 'Vicar explained it last night.'

'Well, I must go,' said John, 'and you haven't heard my news now.'

'Didn't know you had any,' sniffed Mrs. Crouch contemptuously. 'You've been spending all the time nagging and laying down the law as usual.'

To maintain silence under this preposterous ac-

cusation was, John felt, to be almost a 'saint unborn,' and he felt behind him to see if the wings of this mysterious individual were sprouting anywhere about him, as he replied with that patience which the experience of years had taught him.

'I can't say, wife, that I see much harm in a man being fond of his sister! Yes, you may look, but Mrs. Methuen that is to be is the vicar's sister. It's all over the place by now, so you are behind the times, owing, I suppose, to being so averse to gossip.'

Mrs. Crouch literally gasped. Her better half had turned the tables with a vengeance by providing her with the most spicy bit she had had for a long time. However, she was not going to capitulate all at once.

'Sister, indeed,' she said contemptuously; 'I wonder you don't say grandmother! It's likely, isn't it, that he'd live here in the lap of Dives, and let his own flesh and blood work for her living at his very gates, like Lazarus? Beside, didn't his mother tell me that she was an old hen with one chick? Back a man to believe all he hears! What are you looking at me like that for, John?'

'Make what you like of it,' he said significantly, 'it's an ugly story.'

The conscious rectitude of the British artisan of irreproachable morals bristled all over John's portly person, and his wife began to 'smell a rat,' as the saying is.

"Honey sore," John,' she said, which is, being

interpreted, 'evil be,' etc. John looked at her steadily. A man does not so often call a spade a spade as a woman, but when he does, it is never a garden trowel!

'Any one would think, wife,' he said, 'that you were born yesterday! Haven't you ever heard of people's husbands not being any better than they ought to be?'

This was a fine opportunity for revenge, of which Mrs. Crouch was not slow to avail herself.

'Haven't I heard of it?' she cried. 'With you before me every day of my life, I should think I know for a fact that husbands aren't any better than they ought Here, wait a minute, John! Well, "man that is born of woman" is a trouble as the sparks fly, or the crow, I forget which! Sister, indeed! forward hussy, I never could abear her! Sitting on men's knees and confessing her sins at that early age, 'twasn't likely she'd come to any good. And folks do say as she'd been an artist's moral for the newt.' Mrs. Crouch pronounced the word as if it were connected with tadpoles. 'Though I don't rightly know what that is,' she added, 'being a respectable woman who always keeps my clothes on!'

CHAPTER XVII

'THE MILLS OF GOD'

THE study at the parsonage was not at all changed. It seemed to Methuen, as he sat there with Philmore, that all the furniture was in exactly the same place as when he went away; and he told himself that it only needed the litter for which he had always been famous, to bring back the old days, to convert the grave, stern-looking stranger who confronted him into the friend of his youth, to be chaffed and nicknamed with the freedom of intimacy.

There are some people who can bridge the gulf of absence and pick up again the dropped threads of intercourse, all in a moment. Methuen was one of them. In his easy, genial way he expected to walk into his friend's life as easily as he had walked out of it, but something in Philmore's attitude forced upon his mind the remembrance of how they had parted, and also of the gulf which divided their meeting from their parting: he seemed to be shaking hands across it. Their intercourse had meant much more to Philmore than to Methuen. To the latter it was merely an episode, one, too, which subsequent events had

more or less crowded out; but to Philmore it was the one spot of nature in an otherwise unnatural existence. There was a strain of womanliness about him which could not forget—a natural reserve, too, fostered by his habits, which rose up now and effectually barricaded his heart and sealed his lips against the friend for whom he had longed ceaselessly during the greater portion of his life. Philmore's spiritual growth had been abnormal during these years, but in knowledge of the world he had not advanced one step since Methuen left him. He was no more one with his fellow-men than he had been at twenty-eight, and therefore no nearer forming a correct estimate of them. His life had been that inner life of the recluse and the student, which is so wearing because the mind preys upon itself. His higher nature had been developed by circumstances, at the expense of his lower, which was comparatively stunted. Methuen's existence had been more normal, therefore his faculties were better balanced; he had aged in due proportion to his years, while Philmore, owing to a certain lack of development, looked a young man made old by suffering—'elderly young,' Mrs. Crouch called it. Methuen had often told him in the past that virtue did not consist in immunity from temptation; and that by shutting one's self up within four walls while the world goes round, one may miss some of the experiences necessary to the making of manhood,

and looking at Philmore, Methuen decided that he had missed them. He wondered, too, whether they would ever really meet again. It would take, even him, some time to get to know this stern-faced man, who refused to meet him half-way and chose for some reason to ignore the past. Evidently, Methuen thought, he had been presumptuous in building any hope of a future friendship on a lad's passing admiration for his senior, but even he had not credited Philmore with quite such a short memory. Then remembering Elfrida's words, he retracted the Still, no conception of the actual state of affairs came to him-of the surging turmoil in that strained, bewildered brain: of the floods of pent-up feeling struggling for utterance behind the wall of those firmly-closed lips, which habit had sealed so effectually against the betrayal of emotion, that for all practical purposes the emotions themselves had almost ceased to exist. In church, with the contrariness of human nature, Philmore had longed to speak; now that the right time had come, he was dumb. The dream of years had become a reality, so suddenly, that he could not wake all at once and grasp it. The years of self-imposed loneliness and morbid brooding had actually unfitted him for ordinary social intercourse; he dreaded chaff and banter as a man dreads physical pain; as the prisoner released after a lifetime of confinement turns shudderingly from the glaring daylight to the

shadows of the prison-cell where the greater portion of his days have been spent. We are such creatures of habit. First, we cannot do without the sunshine, then we get so used to its absence that by the time it shines again we cannot bear it. The earthly sunshine had come just too late for Philmore; it dazzled him. A very little happiness goes a long way with those unaccustomed to it, and he found himself actually wishing that Methuen would go. And yet all the time the familiar voice was speaking, and the old charm working, and the frozen heart slowly expanding in the unaccustomed warmth.

They talked mostly of trifles, skirting the main topics which lay behind, as people do who dare not approach them, who want to put off the critical moment which must come when the commonplaces to which they cling are thrust aside. And all the time Methuen pretended to be quite at his ease, while Philmore pretended nothing at all.

Elfrida, however, was a safe topic, and one upon which they were both agreed. Methuen went back step by step and traced her influence over him for Philmore's benefit; putting before him with a few vivid touches the child's reappearance in London, and telling quaint stories which recalled the little maid they had both known, and showed with what extraordinary consistency the child's character had developed. He described, without entering into details, the strength of purpose and love of virtue

which had shamed him, and Philmore realised with intense relief that the words of consolation to the dying girl had been only the dwelling of a supersensitive conscience on what might have been. Methuen told him about the letter from Colonel Philmore which he had found upon the dead body of Elfrida's mother, clearly proving the relations which had existed between them, and establishing the child's parentage beyond a doubt.

'She is the most harmonious character I ever knew,' said Methuen. 'In most people you are pulled up short by some glaring inconsistency which is like an ugly feature on an otherwise perfect face, but Elfrida satisfies you all round. She has fulfilled herself, so to speak, in the most marvellous way. Every part of her is evenly developed. I must show you the picture some day,' he added; 'it is the best thing I painted professionally, and the "funny thing in a frock" will amuse you. After that you know I went abroad while Elfrida was at school, and on my return just lately I was in a bad railway accident. That was when I telegraphed for Elfrida.'

There is nothing more hopeless than trying to bridge over the hiatus of silence in one interview. With the best intentions in the world we only make out a disjointed tale: some link in the chain is bound to be missing.

After talking for an hour and a half, Methuen suddenly awoke to the consciousness that all the revelations had been on his side. Philmore had not said a word. Was he listening? The strained, eager expression of the worn face left no doubt about his interest. Why then had Methuen that unsatisfied feeling which forced polite attention always gives? It seemed such an effort to Philmore to listen. His bewildered expression pulled Methuen up short at last in the middle of a sentence.

'Now,' he said, 'it's your turn. We have had too much of me and my affairs. I am glad, though, to know that my little maid has been appreciated. When she set her heart upon being a nurse I determined to send her here to work under you, amidst the old associations. I liked to think of it. There's a compliment for you, Philmore; I hope you appreciate it.'

'She has chosen her profession well,' said Philmore gravely, ignoring the compliment; 'she certainly possesses the art of healing.'

He made a mental reservation, as he spoke, of the occasion on which Elfrida had told her story in church, when the effect of her words on him was certainly the reverse of healing, and again Methuen felt repulsed.

He was gaining no ground; bitterness or reproaches he could have met, but this cold politeness nonplussed him. Still the lust of love, which had always been his ruling passion, would not let him own himself beaten.

He only thought to himself that whoever had

killed Philmore's heart had done it pretty effectually, and yet all the time the other was struggling with the fog of bewilderment which oppressed him, striving to rise to the occasion if he could only realise it, but he wanted time to readjust his mental To a nature like Methuen's it seemed incredible that any male influence could entirely swamp a man's life. Cherchez la femme had been always his principle of action, and, to do him justice. when found, she generally proved worth making a note of in the general summary of cause and effect. A man's life without a woman in it was, to Methuen, an anomaly, and he wondered as he watched Philmore what story lay behind that stony silence. To his mind it was only a question of reserve. ideas on the subject of virtue had always goaded his friend into resistance, and Beryl's on the subject of Molly had recalled them, though at the time he could not think why they were familiar: now he knew.

No wonder, Philmore thought, that Elfrida was tolerant to sinners; she had the inherited fatal tendency on both sides. Then he suddenly remembered that on one side at any rate he had inherited it too, and that instinct of purity about which Methuen was so sceptical, but which really dominated Philmore to a wonderful extent, rose in revolt against his father, and also, in a lesser degree, against Methuen and Elfrida. In fact, his hyper-sensitiveness on this

point amounted almost to a fault, and certainly to a disease, for to shut our eyes to an evil which we know exists, out of consideration for our squeamishness, amounts to moral cowardice. It was only the strength of Philmore's preconceived admiration and respect for Elfrida which had retained her a place in his regard after the revelation which she had made to him that night in church. With essential masculinity he did not dwell on his own reflected discredit through his father's sin, but only on the slur which was thereby cast upon Elfrida.

Of his father, Philmore had never entertained a particularly high opinion. As a boy he had heard him called 'gay,' and had wondered why the fact should make his mother cry, except that even in those days it seemed to him that she never lost an opportunity of crying. Now he understood the Colonel's repeated absences, and the neighbours' comments upon them, with other facts which had puzzled his boyish mind, but, man-like, his chief blame was for Elfrida. He had condemned the laxity of men to the sins of their own sex, but he fell unconsciously into the most common form of it by making a scapegoat of the woman. Methuen had known him so well that, in the light of that knowledge, he wondered what effect the fact that Elfrida was his illegitimate sister had had upon their relations to each other.

Judging Philmore by what he remembered, he

trembled for them both, forgetting that as we grow older we cannot afford to swear by theories, because our conduct generally gives them the lie direct. When we are very hard up for comfort or sympathy, we take what is offered us without considering the quarter from whence it comes.

Philmore's estimation of Elfrida had never changed; only, with a mutual consciousness of altered relations, they had avoided each other.

Methuen watching him, searched in vain for anything that might give him a clue to his past; any common ground on which they might meet as of old, any sign of weakness or betrayal of emotion: there was none. And yet Philmore was very weak; he had been through enough lately, without this crowning excitement, and it was not mere coolness, as Methuen thought, which restrained him, but simply that he was dazed. look asked for patience and pity, and time to recover himself. We forget how to be happy through want of practice, and Philmore had done without affection for so long that he had almost ceased to require it. Methuen realised at last that he had come too late. It was not that Philmore would not return to the old footing; he simply could not. Also, by the strange perversity of human nature, the many, and as it seemed, almost undeserved blessings which Methuen possessed, all paled for the moment in comparison with the one which in its former measure he could never regain. Neglect had not killed Philmore's love, but something was killing him inch by inch, and Methuen, perceiving it, stretched out despairing hands to the vanishing of what in former days had sickened him by its superfluity.

To a casual observer Methuen was not to blame. He could not have been expected to let Philmore stand in the way of his plans, but the laws of nature are very just, and when, after gaining his experiences, he returned to his friend at the eleventh hour, expecting, with the confidence of a successful man, to carry all before him, he found himself confronted by an insuperable barrier; the same divine justice which had taken from Philmore the necessity for human affection, had implanted in Methuen a longing which could never be satisfied, and a sense of self-reproach that would follow him all his life.

He saw, as in a flash, the wreck which he had made of this man's life, and realised the fatal power of devotion with which some natures are cursed, and to do him justice, he was staggered by what he saw. No wonder, for constancy is a rare phenomenon. There are not many Philmores in the world, luckily; for our friends want pleasant faces and ready smiles. We must dance to their piping, even if the tune is not of our choosing.

At last, when every topic seemed exhausted, Methuen rose to go. The time when they did not need to make conversation seemed hopelessly in the past, and Methuen was more disappointed than he cared to own. He stood looking doubtfully at the well-remembered face, studying every line. He was not often at a loss, but he did not know in the least how to take Philmore.

- 'I must go now,' he said, 'as your experiences do not seem to be forthcoming.'
- 'I have none to relate,' was the reply. 'Time has more or less stood still for me. I have managed, however, to sustain the part you assigned me, that of failure, pretty consistently.'
- 'I think,' said Methuen gently, 'that, if you remember, it was the part you assigned yourself.'

Then he went away with that note of bitterness ringing hopefully in his ears. Philmore had shown some feeling at last.

CHAPTER XVIII

'NOT THIS MAN'

'I DON'T think much of bishops,' said Mrs. Crouch viciously. She placed a bag of eggs on the table as she spoke, with more zeal than discretion, and the eggs resented it after the manner of their kind.

It is to be feared that the invalid whom Mrs. Crouch was visiting with various delicacies from the parsonage, felt more deeply on the subject of her smashed eggs than of Mrs. Crouch's unorthodox sentiments. She was used to the latter, Mrs. Crouch being one of the people whose visits are extremely exhilarating but somewhat disturbing. She created a sort of moral whirlwind. While she was there you were kept on tenter-hooks of expectation, but when she had gone you felt that you would not have missed the visit, and the food for reflection which it had left behind, on any account.

Mrs. Crouch was wont to boast proudly that she was no ordinary gossip, and indeed, having followed the profession all her life, she had elevated it almost to the ranks of a fine art. She knew exactly how to dangle a tit-bit temptingly out of reach of her

victim; to show just enough of her hand to make them long for more, and then depart; but she required managing, and the old woman she was visiting understood this perfectly.

Mrs. Jenkins, widow of the vicar's friend Sam, had received her weekly gift at the hands of Mrs. Crouch ever since her husband's death, and therefore knew exactly how to draw her. She had seen throughout the interview that Mrs. Crouch was not herself; also that she was longing to reveal something; but taught by long experience, Mrs. Jenkins waited patiently, wishing the while that her cupboard contained anything likely to tempt her visitor and loosen her tongue.

'It's a cold day,' she remarked somewhat grudgingly, 'and if a little ginger cordial, which is all I have to offer, would warm your inside, it's in the cupboard, if you don't mind helping yourself, which I can't do, seeing I'm tied hand and foot.'

Mrs. Crouch was careful not to accept too readily. She moved to the cupboard with the air of one conferring a favour, which covered a good deal of inward alacrity, and deceived the old woman not a whit. There was just one glass of ginger cordial in the bottle, which Mrs. Crouch emptied to the last drop, then pouring it into a glass, she returned to the bed.

'Mustn't offer you any, of course,' she said; 'bad for your complaint.'

Mrs. Jenkins acquiesced with a sigh, and as she

watched her beloved ginger cordial disappearing down Mrs. Crouch's capacious throat, wondered if the game was worth the candle. Besides, she hadn't heard anything at present. Was she going to be done all round?

'About bishops, you was saying,' she remarked with the air of one who demands her just rights, and Mrs. Crouch had sufficient sense of honour to rise to the occasion.

'Living with the vicar's family as one of their own,' she said loftily, 'there's not much that I haven't had experience of. A letter came from the Bishop this morning.'

'For you?' said the invalid. The words slipped out almost unawares, for with the last drop of the cordial her patience had evaporated. She was tired of all this beating about the bush. Mrs. Crouch glanced at her and she was quelled immediately.

'No offence,' she said. 'Being, as you say, on terms of intimacy with the vicar's family, how was a poor ignorant woman to know as you drew the line at bishops? Happens, too, as I know all about that 'ere letter. Neighbour Wood, who was in just afore you, came making my bed, and who doesn't hold with keeping a poor invalid on tenter-hooks, told me as how vicar had got notice to quit, and she did add as she was very glad, which wasn't her business, as I told her. Anyhow, I suppose he'll be packing up his traps now.'

This was a real *chef-d'œuvre* in the drawing line, and it forced Mrs. Crouch's hand at once. She rose to the bait, throwing caution to the winds.

'Then just you tell neighbour Wood,' she said, 'with my compliments, that she's got hold of the wrong end of the stick. Vicar's had no notice to quit, leastways not from the Bishop,' she added in a lower tone. 'It's he that's given notice, mind that, and repeat the story right way up next time.'

'Then the Bishop's going,' said the invalid so innocently that Mrs. Crouch was really taken in.

'Sairy Jenkins,' she said, 'either you're a born fool, or the complaint is going to your head! Bishop going, indeed! Listen to me. I don't hold with vicar, and never did; his conscience is in the wrong place. It's all very well for grave matters, but to insult a conscience which God has given you by occupying it with gimcracks, whether you have a nasty smell in the church, or whether you don't. But it's no good argufying with vicar; he's that wrong-headed, he'd fling up anything for his tomfooleries and call it conscience.'

'And what about t'other gentleman?' said Mrs. Jenkins. 'Folks do say as he've appeared all handy like, and him so popular, he'll just have a walk over.'

'Then folks say all wrong as usual,' said Mrs. Crouch irately. 'He's come to set things straight in this blessed parish and to quiet their wagging

tongues, and time too; not to mention fetching his bride.'

'The parish nurse, you mean,' said Mrs. Jenkins, 'and the vicar's sister, which is one and the same, as I hear! That's a queer story,' she added significantly; 'rich and poor, they're all alike.'

She felt irritable. The game had distinctly not been worth the candle, and the last drop of the cordial was gone beyond recall.

'Seems to me,' she continued irascibly, 'that your story isn't much different to mine. Anyway, vicar's got his moving orders, and a good thing too.'

'You are right, Mrs. Jenkins,' said a voice from the door; 'good-morning.' The vicar stood there in all the awfulness of that personality which brought dismay even to those not burdened, as Mrs. Jenkins was, with a guilty conscience.

Under cover of his greeting to the invalid, Mrs. Crouch slipped away, while poor Mrs. Jenkins literally disappeared under the bed-clothes, pretending to be very bad indeed. There was no chance, she feared, that the vicar had not heard. The door of her little room, opening flush with the road, had been on the latch, and they were speaking loud. She lay under the bed-clothes in a frightened heap. She was no worse than most people. About as eager to get all she could, and therefore about as truthful as the generality, for when truth 'will out,' loaves and fishes flee away!

Mrs. Jenkins had spoken the truth for once, but she had not intended the vicar to hear, of course -the plain truth for which he had expressed such admiration long ago. No sugar-coated pills for him, he he is said. The plain truth which he had not liked from the lips of Sam, and which all these years after he had not learnt to face. The ugly truth that he was unpopular; that if he went, no one would mind very much. The knowledge that if he had done his duty it ought not to matter to him whether they minded or not, and the humiliating consciousness that it did matter very much. It is rather an ugly fact that worth does not command affection; that the striving and agonising of a lifetime cannot command it like a trick of manner or a turn of speech. Hard and unjust, perhaps, but so is life to those with eyes to see and hearts to feel. Let us wish, by all means, for the indifference of the hard-hearted or the callousness of the fool, but never, as we value our happiness, for a thinking brain or a feeling heart!

The vicar had met Methuen outside; Methuen, whose course through life had been a 'walk over,' as Mrs. Jenkins said; Methuen, who had the world at his feet without asking; who had walked into his kingdom after all these years and found everything ready to his hand, with one exception. Yes, and even Philmore felt that the world was a better place to him for the light of Methuen's smile and the grip of his hand; felt that the parish was itself again,

now that he was in it with his kindly presence and bright personality.

Mrs. Jenkins was crying under the bed-clothes. It made the vicar uncomfortable. He had all a man's objection to tears, particularly a woman's tears, and he couldn't see Mrs. Jenkins; he could only hear her.

- 'My good soul,' he said, 'what's the matter?'
- 'The good soul' raised the bed-clothes an inch, and looked out with one eye. 'Oh, sir,' she said, 'to think I said it, and I wouldn't hurt the feelings of a fly!'
- 'You have nothing to be ashamed of,' said the vicar quietly; 'you only spoke the truth.'

Mrs. Jenkins raised herself to a sitting posture, curiosity prevailing over her sense of shame.

'Be you agoing then, sir?'

'Yes,' said the vicar.

A sense of victory over Mrs. Crouch was the predominant feeling in Mrs. Jenkins's mind, but the vicar evidently expected her to say something.

'Perhaps, sir,' she said lamely, 'you'll be happier somewhere else. You see, the people here don't want an out-of-the-way good man; he's above their heads. What they want is an ordinary kind of man with a heart, and you, sir, savin' your presence, don't seem to have none. Anyway, you've run amuck somehow!'

There was the truth in a nutshell! Philmore

wondered to himself whether he had 'run amuck' through having too much heart or too little.

'Now that other gentleman,' Mrs. Jenkins continued, 'was just loved! He had a way with him that made you feel warm inside like directly he spoke.'

The vicar was silent. He knew that 'way' very well—that quality of 'human nature' which endeared Methuen so to his kind; it had made him 'feel warm inside' just now in spite of himself.

'I hope you ben't offended, sir?' said Mrs. Jenkins wistfully. She was thinking of the little weekly bit of comfort which came from the parsonage. If that stopped, what a high price she would have paid for speaking the truth! The vicar, guessing her thoughts, smiled to himself. Well, he too had wanted his loaves and fishes, and the fact that he had failed to obtain them was no reason for disappointing Mrs. Jenkins. But the world seemed suddenly a dreary place as he stood up rather wearily wishing that they would not bury him before he was dead. It is strange that however well prepared we may be, it is always a shock to hear our opinion of ourselves from some one else's lips.

'No, I'm not offended,' he said gently. 'And as for the other gentleman, as you call him, he was my friend, so I know you're right. Now, good-bye, Mrs. Jenkins, and I won't forget you next week.'

'Oh, sir, thank you kindly. And you so busy with packing up and all.'

'Never mind, I'll find time for that,' was the smiling reply, and Mrs. Jenkins, watching his departing figure as it passed her window, was struck by his feeble gait.

'Well,' she said, 'we're losing a good man in losing him, that's certain.' Then she fell to wondering whether a nice man or a good man was the most desirable as a vicar, but, strangely enough, it never occurred to her to unite the two.

CHAPTER XIX

HIS GIFT OF DEATH

MR. LEARY was much elated by the turn affairs had taken. His plans had worked exactly as he would have wished, and without bringing him into undue prominence.

The Bishop had written to Father Philmore commanding him to discontinue certain practices, and had received in return a prompt reply to the effect that sooner than discontinue them he would resign, which he proceeded to do in due form, assigning his failing health as a further reason.

Nothing could have been neater, Mr. Leary thought, and he congratulated himself on the way in which Providence had evidently furthered his plans by removing Father Philmore at exactly the right moment. Mr. Leary had his own views as to the sequel of all this, but while events were pending, he deemed it more graceful to withdraw from the scenes, which he accordingly did with his family. Doris breathing out to the last her sympathy for Father Philmore, and her unchanged aversion to Elfrida; the fact of the latter's relationship to the

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vicar not having altered her attitude in the least. Minds of the stamp of Doris Leary's cling with wonderful tenacity to an impression once gained.

It went to Doris' heart to leave the new *locum* tenens provided by the Bishop to fill a gap, and who by virtue of the irresistible and rare combination of cleric and ladies' man rose rapidly into popular favour. No afternoon-tea was considered complete without this new acquisition, and what he lacked in theology he made up by his charming manners, which were always being contrasted with Father Philmore's deficiencies, though to do the latter justice, he had never been seen at an afternoon-tea in his life.

Methuen was somewhat disgusted at the fickle plaudits of the crowd. He lay very low in those days, avoiding the church and hovering about his friend, sickened even by the popular favour shown to himself. He was more broken down than Elfrida had ever seen him. This one partial failure had opened his eyes to the fact that we cannot have things all our own way; cannot make another suffer needlessly, without in some way suffering ourselves.

Methuen felt himself in a way to blame for Philmore's condition. There was nothing now that he would not have done to make life worth living to the man who had tested the possibilities which it held for him, and found them emptiness; but he could not inspire him with the wish to live—could not turn away his longing eyes from the door of escape which

was opening wider and wider as the days went on. The cold-water cure may brace a healthy nature, but with Philmore it had broken the springs of life and left him without either the wish or the power to contend against disease.

He was very busy. There was much to be done in setting his affairs in order, though his notice to quit was not quite what Mrs. Jenkins had imagined.

He had always been consumptive, and this natural tendency had not been improved by his life and habits. In his usual irritable way, he had turned his back on his mother's inquiries and remonstrances, and even Nurse Evans' counsels of prudence had fallen on deaf ears; and now the excitement and worry of the past few months had somewhat precipitated matters, that was all. There was no immediate danger, the doctor said, and 'with care he might last some months.'

'And without care?' Philmore asked with veiled eagerness.

The doctor glanced curiously at the glowing, spiritualised face. 'Without care,' he answered sharply, 'it will be a question of weeks or days.'

'Queer customer,' he muttered to himself as Philmore went away smiling with his sentence of release; that death-warrant which the doctor had pronounced with polite and natural regret, but which would probably unite him to his fellow-humans much more closely than life had ever done.

He could afford to smile at it all now that his heart's desire was a question of months at most.

Philmore kept his old failings to the last. We do not necessarily become sanctified because we are dying, any more than we become metamorphosed after we are dead. We die as we have lived usually, except that we die alone, whether we have lived alone or not.

He lay holding himself in his hand, as it were, for inspection, in that fatal way of his; reviewing his life for the last time before it passed into more merciful Hands. He was harsh as ever in his sweeping condemnation of his people; paying court even now, as he knew, to the charming manners and moderate ritual of his successor, as they had once paid court to him, to his eloquence and devotion, and advanced views, though not to his personality. Their zeal had misled him at first. He had thought it was zeal for God, and in his disgust he had hardened his heart against them—that heart which had been no nearer God than theirs! His love had been just as selfish as Methuen's neglect in its way, and to him, too, had come his heart's desire and leanness; and now there was nothing left but that place of waiting, which is the heaven of such souls as his, where he hoped to unravel the mystery of failure.

Philmore's death was not quite so aloof as his life had been. As at the midnight mass, his spirit seemed to draw nearer to those it was about to leave; pausing on the threshold for just one word of regret. Alas, poor, unreasonable human nature, for the word never came, and with very good reason. If our lives have not been 'lovely and pleasant,' our death is no cause for regret, and nothing but sickly sentiment can make it so; that sentiment which Philmore had always despised.

After all, there is nothing to regret in death as death; it is only the natural end of life; the last move, and either the best or the worst, according to ourselves. It is only when death cuts short a life which we want to live that it is unwelcome; to Philmore it came as a better gift than life could ever have been. In fact, though no one would have credited it, he had never been less morbid than in his desire for death.

It is strange what a dislike happy people have to being confronted with unhappiness in others! They seem to look on it as a sort of reproach to themselves, and try to explain it away by every reason but the right one. It is a discontented temperament, they will tell you, which makes the difference, between you and them. Anything but the fact that they are happy and you are not. They won't call a spade a spade, and one can't much blame them, for truth is a bitter thing when brutalised by the lips of man. Not God's truth, but our idea of it, generally a more or less perverted one; that truth which, like a Nemesis, had followed Father Philmore all his life.

There was stamped on him, indelibly as the brand of Cain, a something which is stamped on certain people, and which makes it very hard for them to have been born. Father Philmore had never learnt, and never would learn to measure things by the ordinary conventional standpoint of the world, and the world hated him for it. He expected great things of life which he never received, and therefore, being rather disagreeable to start with, he became gradually more so. It was not so much that he was superior to the world, as that he had never, so to speak, found his way about in it. He was not at home there. No human being would ever really have satisfied Philmore. If Methuen had not left him when he did, it is probable that later on Philmore would have been disappointed in him. The embittering process would not have been the same, but a purely human affection must have failed to satisfy the requirements of such a nature. There was something wanting in Philmore's life because there was something wanting in him; he seemed to possess no lower nature.

Life is only a grand and glorious thing if we attain its possibilities, if by dint of pressing we obtain a front seat, which Methuen had prophesied long ago that Philmore would never do. Even with a back one we can see a little of the show between the heads, or over the shoulders, of the more lucky folk in front; but Philmore had found no seat at

all, and he was very tired. He had missed the possibilities of life, so he stretched out eager hands to those of death. Well for him that he could; that the thought of the life to come was a compensation. There are some natures which seem to slip between two stools, who having somehow missed their chances here, can yet look forward to none hereafter; to whom, by reason of their temperament, Eternity presents no joys.

Philmore was not of these. If no summons had come, he would have gone on to the end with what patience he could muster. As it was, he took his chance, and thanked God for it.

There was nothing to regret, as he told Methuen, adding with a smile, that death was the only artistic consummation to such a life as his; the only thing left for him to do.

Their friendship was on a higher level in these last days than it had ever been. On Philmore's side the earthly element was purged away by the presence of death. His friendship for Methuen had been the nearest approach to passion which his unpassionate nature had known. Methuen had expended his passion in other and more normal relations, but for him, too, their friendship was purified and elevated. The patronising element, which had permitted the adoring affection of a subordinate, was changed into a humble and admiring affection for a mortal soon to 'put on immortality.' Methuen had always

entertained what he described as a 'sneaking weakness for the Infant.' We keep a very soft spot in our hearts for those who love us, whether we return their affection or not, and next to Elfrida, the thought of Philmore had helped and strengthened Methuen all his life. The uncompromising hardness of the doctrines propounded by his young admirer had commended themselves by force of contrast to the almost unwilling respect of the man whose one ambition had been to make his own life as smooth as possible. He had laughed at Philmore's 'ritual,' but he knew in his heart that it was not contemptible, but a beautiful thing in God's sight, because the best he had to give. It is only when the shell is deceptive and made to do duty for a kernel, that we have any right to quarrel with its beauty. and Philmore's capacity for truth had helped him in this case. The kernel of his nut was missing, or at any rate irretrievably damaged, so he made the shell as beautiful as possible, but he knew it for a shell all It was quite of a piece with his negative the time. existence as contrasted with Methuen's positive one. They were a good study in opposite temperaments. Perhaps Methuen had taken, on the whole, a stronger position, because it is easier to subdue qualities than to increase, or one might almost say, to create them.

A sort of awed hush prevailed in the parish. The vicar had always been regarded as a kind of saint, and now the feeling was intensified by the halo with

which custom and sentiment combine to surround the dying.

Philmore rather liked it; he had received so little kindness in life that he welcomed anything which brought it, though he never for one moment mistook the awed reverence with which they regarded him for the kindly human interest they would have felt in Methuen. They were many who inquired after him, but very few who asked to see him; who dared to penetrate to the room where he lay waiting for death as a bridegroom waits for his wedding morning.

A feeling of expectancy, too, was in the air. Philmore recognised it with a sort of grim humour as he lay dying. Methuen felt it too, and it sickened him. He almost hated the welcome which he received everywhere; the air of unspoken but implied proprietorship which the people assumed over him.

'Welcome the coming, speed the parting.' The order of the words is significant, for the outgoing guest is generally hustled off the premises with more haste than decency by that great and universal law of change which in its headlong course is sweeping us all along.

In this case it was only the expression of popular fancy; Methuen could never fill that position again. It seemed to him already that he had walked to most of his successes over the body of his friend, and the thought of this last, in particular, seemed almost indecent, while the man so much better than

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himself lay dying. So the usually kind hands pushed the children roughly away for Philmore's sake; Philmore, who would not have grudged him this passing triumph; Philmore who, happy in his gift of death, had passed already beyond the power of earthly things to wound or soothe.

There was no need, in this case, 'to speed the parting guest': the 'wheels of his chariot' did not 'tarry'; they were bearing him swiftly from his life of failure to another life where he hoped to discover why he had failed.

Elfrida was often with Philmore now. always admired her, chiefly because she was not afraid of him. She had treated him more like a human being and less like a saint or a stone than most people. His mother, too, came and went, frightened as ever of her son, and understanding him as little, but grateful for his new gentleness. had conceived a wonderful admiration for Methuen, who combined, in her opinion, all the qualities a man ought to possess, and which her son emphatically Philmore was glad; he commended his poor little mother to the care of his friend, who would be so much more patient with her than he had been. There were days still when he was very irritable, when even the prospect of release was lost sight of in the ever present pain, when death seemed as great an effort as life had been.

It seemed to Philmore, as the days went on, that

he was very like old Sam, just about as disagreeable and about as lonely. He was dying hard, too, just as Sam had done: nothing had ever come easy to Father Philmore. And Methuen was tending him just as he had tended Sam, without many thanks. Neither Philmore nor Sam had ever been good at expressing their thanks.

It was fitting, Philmore thought, that the figure which had haunted his life should be the last upon which his eyes rested. That others should come and go, but Methuen be always there. . . .

One day, when he had been more than usually restless and irritable after a bad night, Methuen had left him almost for the first time, and his mother had relieved guard. As a rule, she and Mrs. Crouch divided the night work between them, while Methuen took the day. Philmore found these nights unendurable. Not even the fact that in the immediate future, he would be 'a lovely corpse,' seemed to soften Mrs. Crouch's heart towards him, and his mother's perpetual fussiness irritated him almost more. To-day she had brought him some flowers, single white narcissi, which he particularly disliked as it happened, and he told her so, and asked her rather irritably to take them away.

They reminded him of spring, and he always hated the spring; its freshness seemed to mock him. It was death that he wanted, not life. He lay watching his mother as she walked meekly away, bearing her

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despised offering—a poor, bent little figure, with white, smoothly banded hair and trembling hands. He was sorry now. After all, the smell of the flowers would not have hurt him during his short remaining span of life! Such a short span; much too short to learn to be gracious for him who had been such a stickler for truth all his life; much too short to learn forbearance when he had not learnt it in all the years that lay behind! Still, he would try; he had always tried, God knew.

'Mother,' he said, but she did not hear him; she was talking to Mrs. Crouch, in the adjoining room. The words reached his ears from afar, as it were, only one here and there. . . . What was Mrs. Crouch saying? She seemed to be talking very kindly of some one. Could it be of him? Death always covered a multitude of sins with Mrs. Crouch, and she was a good soul after all.

'You're just wore out,' she was saying commiseratingly. 'It'll be a blessed release when the Lord takes him.'

'A blessed release.' Well, it was quite true, only somehow after that Philmore did not care to listen any more. Could it be that he was getting tired of truth? . . . 'A blessed release!' He had said the same himself, only Mrs. Crouch had put it rather differently. She was quite right, though, and that stupid notion of his, that people put up with so much

from the dying, had been all a mistake. After all, why should they? Had he put up with the flowers a moment ago? No, even with his heart singing for joy, his lips had spoken harshly, as was their wont. Even now the sound of his mother's sobs irritated him as they had always done. Why in the world should she cry because he was dying?...

Mrs. Crouch was speaking again, and the failing ears strained themselves to listen, with a bitter determination to hear the worst, and perhaps a forlorn hope that the next words might be kinder.

'Loved?' she said. 'I believe you! Why, he's just adored round here. You should see the children run to him; and they always know a good thing, the Bible says.'

Children! Ah, no, it could not be meant to apply to him. Not even when surrounded by the kindly halo of death could Philmore be described as fond of children! No, it was Methuen, of course. Methuen, who was never irritable; Methuen, who had everything! But not death; he had forgotten that; not his beautiful gift of death, radiant with promise and untried possibilities! Philmore lay down very quietly. . . .

'There is nothing to be afraid of in him,' Mrs. Crouch continued, to the weeping little figure at her side, who gave a sorrowful little moan of assent. 'He never snaps people up.'...

No, and there was nothing to be afraid of in

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Philmore now; he would never 'snap people up' again...

Mrs. Crouch went in presently, and, with the inconsistency of human nature, began to cry. Why was she crying, at what she herself had described as 'a blessed release'?

He had died alone, to be sure; but what did it matter to him how he had died, so long as he was dead? He did not want to stay, or they to keep him, and his death was not half so sad as his life had been. After all, as he himself had said, there was nothing to regret.

She moved softly about the room, doing her usual offices with none of her usual ghastly delight in the occupation; dropping a few tears now and then for the man whom she had reverenced so much and liked so little. Presently she paused, and going to a little distance, surveyed the result of her work, with natural pride.

'Well,' she said admiringly, 'nature and grace do make a lovely corpse! Now, if he'd always looked like that, actually kind o' loving! Like when he first came, only more so.'

Yes, the ugly sneer had gone from his face at last. The lad had loved Methuen, and Methuen had failed him; but the man loved God, and God cannot fail, they say. Anyway, Philmore had gone to see, and apparently he had found it true.

CHAPTER XX

'A LITTLE CHILD'

'OH, please let her in to the Catholic Church.'

The words were almost childish; and the voice had a suspicious break in it, as if tears were not far off, and again Methuen stooped his head over the pleader, who was pleading this time for the admittance of some one else, which she apparently found a much harder piece of work than her own had been.

'Yes,' he said dryly, 'I let you in, certainly; but I did not think then what I was doing. I was almost as ignorant as you in those days, young woman.'

'Well, that is flattering,' cried his wife gaily. 'It does not say much for the success of Elfrida the first in the Catholic Church that you are so unwilling to admit Elfrida the second.'

He took her hands in his. 'I did not mean it in that way,' he said more gravely, 'only it is so long since—that—I might bungle. Get some one else—little maid.'

'No one else can baptize the baby,' she replied firmly, but she knew what he meant perfectly. She

knew that the second Elfrida would not be admitted as the first had been, with a light word and a jest, but in that new and wonderful humility which had grown upon Methuen, somehow, since Philmore's death. She knew, too, what it would cost him to officiate again in any church, and particularly in S. Sebastien's, where neither of them had been since the new and 'moderate' vicar reigned supreme in Philmore's place. She knew all this, and yet, with a pertinacity that was hardly like her, she clung to her point. She had planned every detail of her baby's baptism with what Methuen chose to call the fancy of a spoilt child, though he knew well that it was something deeper, and she did not mean to have her picture spoilt at the last moment.

There were many Catholic Churches, of course, as he said, but only one which would ever embody the full meaning of the word to Elfrida, only one central figure that was possible to her picture—the central figure of her life. And so in the end she had her way; Methuen yielding, as he had always yielded, to her pleadings, with one exception.

The second Elfrida did not apparently share her mother's affection for the 'Catholic Church,' for, judging by the sounds to which her sturdy young lungs gave vent, she was being admitted very much against her will! Possibly the absence of the baptismal shell, which Methuen had noticed, troubled her inherited Catholic proclivities. Anyway, the

expression of protest on the puckered-up baby-face amused him, remembering as he did how gaily her mother had started on the path which, in her case, was self-chosen, and whereon, by a combination of events, rare as it was beneficent, she had followed duty, and love had followed her!

Mrs. Crouch was among the group round the font; Mrs. Crouch now in the proud position of nurse to the second Elfrida, whom she had taken unreservedly to the heart which had never really admitted her mother except for Methuen's sake. The baby, however, was a fine opportunity for putting in practice certain theories of Mrs. Crouch's on what she called 'improved salvation,' meaning sanitation! Her own baby having died at birth, had nipped its mother's system in the bud; there was therefore a large store of unused 'salvation' lying in readiness for the favoured Elfrida, whose parents, however, kept a strict look-out lest an overdose should make her too good to live!

Mrs. Crouch called the baby 'her Benjamin.' Why, no one quite understood, but then no one expected to understand Mrs. Crouch's scriptural allusions; and, as she said, 'people are such dunderheads! As if a man on a galloping horse couldn't see that this 'ere blessed baby is the son of my old age, just as Benjamin was of Joseph's or Isaac's, I forget which. As to the question of "sect," well, I've never been one to stick at such a trifle with the Bible: I've

taken it as I found it, and used it according, all my life.'

After which argument, she was allowed to insult or honour, according to opinion, the sex of 'Elfrida Beryl' in peace.

The latter name, by the way, was a dire offence to Mrs. Crouch. She had never forgotten, and she never allowed Elfrida to forget, that she had highly disapproved of Nurse Beryl Evans, and to perpetuate the incident by means of the name was, in her opinion, an insult to herself and her nursling. Methuen, however, thought otherwise.

Mrs. Crouch would often assure her unconscious charge, between showers of kisses, that she meant to be strictness itself one day. 'For I always did say,' she would add, 'bring up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he shall flourish like a green bay tree! No relapses from the straight and narrow way for you, my sweet! No morals for the newt, or sitting on vicar's knees, saving, of course, your blessed papa's, which every one knows is safe as the rock of ages!'

Mrs. Crouch was divided in her feelings just now, between sympathy for that same 'blessed papa,' whose daughter was making such a disgracefully noisy entrance into the 'Catholic Church,' and a feeling almost of indignation with Methuen for allowing the child to cry. Babies were generally so quiet with him; he had the knack of holding them,

which is a natural art, and not to be acquired as some young and nervous curates imagine by practising on the unlucky infants.

However, as the ceremony proceeded, and the great act was safely accomplished, 'Elfrida Beryl,' feeling that the worse was over, resigned herself to the inevitable, and went to sleep quietly in her mother's arms.

Then, for the first time, Methuen allowed his eyes to wander. The place was very little changed, he thought. It had lost, perhaps, its air of extreme newness, and the crucifix was nowhere to be seen; neither, of course, was 'the funny thing in a frock,' though no one seemed to miss either the one or the other. Evidently moderation reigned supreme, and the people had adapted themselves to the existing state of things, as all wise people do. It is the Philmores of this world; the strange, uncomfortable, 'out-of-the-way' people, as Mrs. Jenkins put it, who seem to do all the regretting. Methuen thought for a moment of a certain grave in the cemetery that was tidy, always tidy, but upon which no flowers were ever placed, because Philmore had not liked flowers, and then of the restless, unsatisfied soul that had struggled so long in its 'prison-house of clay,' and escaped at last. Who could pity or wish it back, for surely, if there was justice anywhere, to Philmore as to him, had come at last his heart's desire.

He glanced at the dark head of his small daughter

lying against her mother's arm, and then away down the well-remembered aisle, to the Lady Chapel, where Elfrida had surprised Philmore at his devotions, and from which he had emerged with that half-irritated, half-saintly expression that Methuen remembered so well.

He saw it all again. The child with a child's unerring instinct turning from Philmore to 'the man who had let her in'; that dark head so like the baby's pressed against his arm, and the childish voice saying, 'I should like to confess to you, you're such a nice man.' And in his heart, Methuen had quite agreed, as stooping from his great height he had taken the small hand in his, and accepted the charge, kindly but patronisingly, as he did everything in those days. Ah, well, he knew better now; he had learnt to stoop since then, for things had been reversed, and all his life, a little child had led him.

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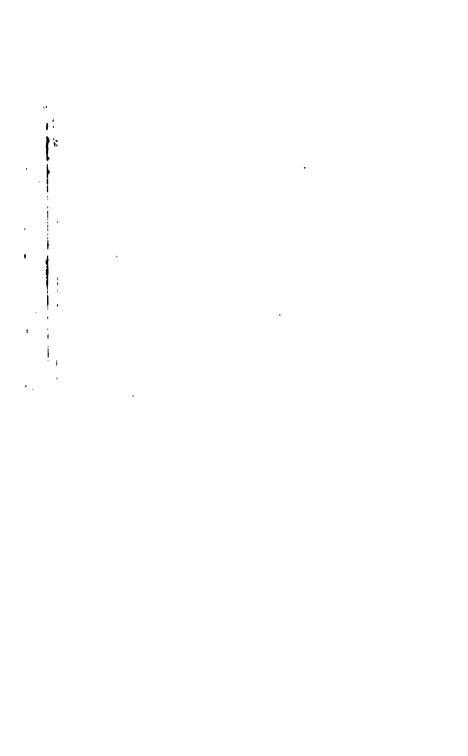
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